

A MODEL FOR FOSTERING FAITH MATURITY
USING MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FAITH
FORMATION INTERVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

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The ministry context is Mount Zion Baptist Church of Mechanicsville, Virginia. There was no model for assessing and developing faith maturity within the church. The hypothesis was that the assessment and development of faith would positively impact the faith praxis of the church leadership. The methodology used was a pre and post Faith Maturity Scale assessing the current level of faith maturity and measuring the effectiveness of the interventions utilized. A Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model was used to increase the knowledge and develop the faith maturity of the church leadership. The data showed a positive impact and slight statistical significance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below.”

The writer begins by acknowledging the source of his strength, his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whom he lives, moves, and have his being. He realizes that without the Lord, this undertaking would not have been possible. He is grateful to the Lord for entrusting this awesome task to him and prays that it is pleasing in His sight. This endeavor has taught the writer, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Secondly, he acknowledges all of his ancestors, foremothers and fathers who desired to receive an education but were not afforded the opportunity because of the strictures and structures of a society that denied persons of color equal access. Despite the denials, they prayed, hoped against hope, marched, boycotted, placed themselves in harm’s way, and even died so that the writer would be afforded this opportunity. All that the writer does is in honor of all that they did. And yet, the writer is keenly aware that his desire to be all that he can be pales in comparison to their desires, dreams and wishes. The writer acknowledges their struggles and honors their legacies of love.

The writer acknowledges his wife for being his friend, confident, counselor and motivator. He thanks and praises God for her involvement in and influence on his life. She has inspired the writer to be better and do better. The writer also want to acknowledge his children Paul Jr., Andre, and Erica for their understanding as *Dad* pursued this undertaking. He thanks them. The writer is blessed and honored by the persons they are and are becoming. He also wants to acknowledge his parents, the

Reverend Dr. Gloria Flowers and Deacon Alvin A. Flowers, for training and raising him in the way that he should go and for instilling in him a love of God and learning. Thank you for your tough love. Thank you for your example of selfless service. It was and is your example that modeled for the writer true servant leadership and selfless service. Their rich legacy and life lessons are being passed on to a new generation of servant leaders.

The writer acknowledge his maternal Grandmother, Lula B. White, who went back to school later in life and earned her degree. Her message, although never articulated in words was clear that with God all things are possible and that he could do all things through Christ who strengthens him. He is eternally grateful to all of those who raised and nurtured him. Space does not permit me to thank the innumerable persons; the men and women who thought enough of him to dedicate the free time and spare time to ensure that he would be the best that he could be. The writer thanks you from the bottom of his heart. You often saw in the writer what he did not see in himself.

The writer is grateful for the legacy left by his first Pastor, the late Reverend Dr. Miles J. Jones, and the saints at the Providence Park Baptist Church. It was during those years that the writer grew the most in wisdom as well as stature. It was his vision that ensured that Christian Education had its proper place within the overall ministry of the church. The writer benefited greatly from this emphasis on proper biblical and Christian formation.

The writer is also grateful for the opportunity to serve with and under the Reverend Dr. Jerome C. Ross at Providence Park. Dr. Ross awakened in the writer a love for the mind and taught me that you can love God with your mind. Those years were

formative and foundational to the writer's identity as a preacher/teacher. Ultimately, the writer thanks God for the witness of that baptized body of believers. They shaped the writer and shared with him in his own baptism, his marriage, his ordination as a deacon, his acceptance into seminary, and the dedication of his first-born son.

The writer also acknowledges with great appreciation the Antioch Baptist Church and the Reverend Dr. James Sailes. The Antioch family licensed the writer to preach and allowed him the freedom to fan my gift. They provided for him a nurturing community of faith, wherein he was engaged in a practicum of ministry. Antioch continues to be a warm and welcoming community of faith. Again, the writer thanks God for their witness.

The writer is thankful for the Mount Zion church family for allowing him the privilege of serving as their twelfth pastor. He is especially grateful to the MZBC Servant Leadership Team without which the completion of this project would not have been possible. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to this ministry project. Thank you for insight and encouragement. Thank you for being who you are. And most importantly, thank you for the ways in which you serve God by serving His people.

The writer also want to thank his professional associates, Lamont Flowers, Ph.D., Lawrence Flowers, Ph.D. and the Reverend Dr. James Sailes, D.Min. He wants to thank his context associates, Brother Freddie Robinson, Sister Yvette Rustin, Reverend Barbara Abrams-Wallace, Brother Johnny Douglas and Deacon Robert Barnette for your support and suggestions. Your companionship on this journey strengthened me. A special acknowledgment to his peer associate Roy Jones whose dedication and devotion to the things of God and God's people has been a constant source of inspiration and influence.

Additionally, the writer wants to acknowledge his mentors Drs. Ricky Woods, Terry Thomas, and Reginald Dawkins who challenged him and inspired him by their devotion, dedication, commitment, wisdom and ministry of teaching. The writer is eternally grateful and forever changed by the experience. Finally, the writer wants to thank the members of the Thomas/Dawkins Fellows. He is excited about what the future holds for each of you. He thanks God for the privilege of having met you all and for the times of fellowship and study. He will always cherish those moments of community and collegiality.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to his partner in life and ministry; his wife for her patience and gentle prodding in pursuit of this educational milestone. The writer is eternally grateful and indebted to her for her love, support, and encouragement throughout the years. You have been the wind beneath his bruised and oftentimes battered wings.

ABBREVIATIONS

ESV	English Standard Version
ETC	Et Cetera
FMS	Faith Maturity Scale
MFFM	Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model
MZBC	Mount Zion Baptist Church
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NKJV	New Kings James Version

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project was to assess the level of faith maturity, pre- and post-interventions, of the servant leadership team of the Mount Zion Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, Virginia. While it is every believer's responsibility and calling to mature in their faith, the writer recognized that oftentimes the measurements and mechanisms are not in place to assess and develop the maturity of the faithful. Furthermore, the writer believes that the church is called to the development of others through discipleship that they might grow in their understanding and application of faith. This is the main reason that the Pastor is called to a local body of believers. It is in Ephesians that we are reminded:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹

The New Living Translation offers those same verses in this paraphrase:

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that

¹Eph 4:11-12 (NIV).

we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.²

These verses remind us that the role of ministry is the equipping or training of God's people in a practical sense to do the work of the Kingdom of God. This further suggests some intentionality on the part of the Pastor/Teacher in developing a balanced understanding of faith. Particularly, what it means to embody and express faith within the local church. This writer understands Gary Chamberlain understood and articulated in his work entitled *Fostering Faith*. It was in that text where he expressed the viewpoint that "good ministry today demands growth in faith: ministers 'must have grown in sufficient depth in faith and moral living to be able to help others do the same.'"³

Therefore in Chamberlains construction faith a "sufficient depth in faith" was necessary in the pastor/teacher/minister in order for that person to aid others in the development or maturing of their faith. In other words, the pastor in this context, needed to possess a depth of faith or a maturity of faith, which recognized "personal weaknesses and a willingness to share those with others."⁴ This suggests that the pastor/teacher did not have to have all of the answers but at least should be willing to enter into dialogue within the community and be secure enough to accept what gifts, strengths and insights others brought to the table.⁵

This revelation allowed the writer to approach this project not as an expert but as a partner within the communal context. This partnering enabled both writer and

²Eph 4:11-12 (NLT).

³Gary Chamberlain, *Fostering Faith: A Minister's Guide to Faith Development* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988). 8.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

community to engage in courageous conversations and to enter into deeper levels of relationship. This was significant because the writer recognized that there would be varied meanings assigned to the concept called *faith*. He further realized that if there were varying meanings assigned to the concept of faith, then, there would be as many divergent views related to how or even if faith could be matured. This was the challenge and the task this writer faced and undertook. The writer was faced with the daunting task of creating a multi-dimensional interventional model to facilitate the maturing of faith.

The first obstacle to be overcome, however, was to attempt to articulate a statement of faith? Is faith merely a statement of profession or confession? Or is faith as an expression or experience something more dynamic? And ultimately, what role does it play in the ongoing ministry and identity of the local church context? This writer began this project with that basic question in mind. Again, Chamberlain offers the following insight:

If ministry involves an awakening of the minister and others to the service of gospel faith, then understanding the meaning and development of faith itself becomes central to the understanding of ministry. When we visualize ministry as the unfolding of personal gift in response to a gospel call within the particular needs of church and society (call, concern, and context), the centrality of faith would seem obvious... The faith roots of the minister as enabler, interpreter, and servant will be expressed in the imaginative capacities for “seeing” God’s presence in the world and envisioning realities which incorporate that presence for others.⁶

The defining, however, of faith seems to be elusive. If one were to accept the writer of Hebrews declaration that faith is “the substance of things hoped for and the

⁶Ibid.

evidence of things not seen.”⁷ One would be left with the impression that faith came be reduced to mere belief. In this way, faith becomes an intellectual exercise or assent to the “truth of a proposition based upon the authority of the one revealing the proposition.”⁸

The more reliable the source of the proposition the more faith one would place in the truth as espoused by that source. However, if one were not sure of the source or found the source untrustworthy then the acceptance of that proposition would be tenuous. Yet, in many churches across the country the declaration of the writer of Hebrews coincides with what they would identify with as a dynamic faith. In other words, to the extent that one can hope in what one does not see, grasp, or yet experience is for many considered a dynamic, vibrant, and living faith. In a study conducted by the Barna Research Group, 80 to 90 percent of the respondents in this study equated faith to belief in truth propositions.⁹

More disconcerting than that is the fact that for these respondents this represented a vibrant and living faith. Yet, in the mind of Chamberlain and this writer, it has only led to the bifurcation of matters of faith from the rest of life.¹⁰ The question still remains, what is the proper understanding of a faith that is dynamic, vibrant, and living? This writer believes that such a faith begins with the understanding that faith has to be comprehensive. Faith has to be seen as embodying more than just belief but also

⁷Heb11:1a (NIV).

⁸Chamberlain, *Fostering Faith*, 9.

⁹George Barna, *Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity*, www.barna.org (accessed May 2011).

¹⁰Chamberlain, 9.

corresponding action. Faith is more than just an intellectual practice and must encompass practical application. This notion is supported by theologians and faith thinkers such as Gregory Baum, Karl Rahner and James Fowler. Chamberlain in offering their insights asserts:

For theologian Gregory Baum faith ‘involves the whole person...in faith (the person) is delivered from the confines of his own existence and passes beyond himself to the One who approaches him in grace.’ In Karl Rahner faith, as God’s free gift, is ‘an abiding feature of man’s mode of existence as person.’ In the words of James Fowler... ‘faith is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one’s hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions.’ In these understandings faith is the very mode through which the person shapes new self-understandings and new orientations toward the world. In this way, faith becomes a constitutive dimension of the human person, and the person’s beliefs, values, and actions reveal an understanding of the self and the world-which serves as the basic metaphor for life.¹¹

The writer’s contention is that faith must become the basic metaphor of the Christian life. The Reverend Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor who asserted, “Life is a faith proposition, held this viewpoint. One must set certain faith hypotheses before each endeavor and then act, live, proceed, trust, and behave as though those hypotheses were true, and that very acting, living, proceeding, trusting, and behaving will make them true!”¹² Howard Thurman in *The Inward Journey* makes the following declaration regarding the expression of faith:

There seems to be a valid distinction between belief and faith. Often we think of belief as having to do exclusively with a body of ideas, notions, concepts, or the like. The term is identical with dogma and creed. But it is not that aspect of belief that is always decisive in living. There is a simpler definition of belief that carries

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Samuel Dewitt Proctor and William Watley, *Sermons from the Black Pulpit* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984), 72.

with it a meaning well with the experience of all who live: A man's belief is what he does, what he practices...it is the inner consistency of his basic behavior.¹³

James Evans states that truth slightly different by declaring the "Christian faith as the experiential encounter with God which demands both public and private expression."¹⁴ This writer agrees that faith requires both public and private expression. However, it is the writer's contention that the private expressions of faith have superseded the public expression of faith. This public expression of faith, according to Chamberlain must "exhibit a communitarian and participatory nature."¹⁵ This viewpoint, in the writer's estimation, is consistent with the message of the Bible. This is implicitly implied in the epistle written by James in the 2nd Chapter of his letter to the churches, he writes beginning in the 14th verse:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead."¹⁶

This text supports the writer's claims that there are certain priorities, attitudes, commitments, and perspectives related to faith that must be embraced in order to embody a dynamic, active, vibrant, and living faith. This project seeks to develop a faith more in line with the Biblical model of faith as reflected in the Letter written by James, which is communitarian and participatory in nature.

¹³Howard Thurman, *The Inward Journey* (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1961), 22.

¹⁴James Evans. *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992), 54.

¹⁵Chamberlain, 9.

¹⁶Jas 2:14 (NIV).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess or measure the priorities, commitments, and perspectives of the church leadership in a tradition rich, rural Baptist church in a neighboring county of Richmond Virginia. The study will provide an insight into the historical, ecclesiastical, and theological conversation of what it means to live a life of faith.

Chapter One, Introduction, begins to define the scope of the project and to outline what the writer feels is the personal and research based significance of pursuing this study within his particular context.

Chapter Two will provide an overview of the pertinent literature related to the faith maturity model and will thereby allow the writer an opportunity to enter the conversation related to faith, faith maturity and development as well as faith formation.

Chapter Three will focus on the theoretical foundation for this study, namely the historical, biblical, and theological foundations. This chapter will focus historically on the Patristic Fathers and their input to the conversation of faith, namely Origen and Augustine. It will further explore the thinking of the reformers like John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, and Martin Luther. It will address the Puritans influence and impact on John Wesley. And will posit John Wesley, as one who understood the import of faith as more than intellectual assent and belief in creedal confessions or formulas. Finally, this section will seek to identify the major factors that have contributed to the development of the faith maturity scale and impacted faith maturity.

Specifically, this chapter will explore faith, faith development, and its impact on the development of a faith maturity scale and faith formation. The biblical section of this chapter will explore Genesis 12 verses 1-4 and James 2 verses 14-26. Particular focus

will be centered upon introducing the passage selected, the reason for selecting that particular passage, the setting of the passage and the interpretation of that passage.¹⁷ In addition, the biblical section will present Abraham as paradigmatic of a dynamic, active, and lived faith. It will seek to explore the attitudes, priorities and commitments of Abram/Abraham that are constitutive of what the writer proposes to be worthy of emulation.

Chapter Four will discuss the writers working hypotheses, description of the ministry project including interventions used, research design, measurements and instrumentation. Chapter Five will show the results of the measurement and instrumentation as well as provide insight into the methodology of data collection and will postulate how this method of collecting data impacted the data results.

Chapter Six will disclose and discuss the major findings of the study. The writer will further summarize the data to determine the implications of the findings. This chapter will also seek to answer a number of questions related to the study, such as what literature supports the main findings, what literature contradicts or does not support those findings? What are the implications for practice and how might this assessment be used in other ministry contexts? What are potential implications for future research? The writer will also discuss what they felt were the limitations of the study, i.e. demographics, length, number, and types of interventions, data collection, and analysis methods.

¹⁷Nancy Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 149.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The purpose of this project is to assess and develop the faith maturity of a specific group of leaders in a rural African American church by educating, encouraging and empowering them to embrace and embody “the priorities, commitments, and perspectives characteristic of vibrant and life transforming faith, as these have been understood in ‘mainline’ protestant traditions.”¹ This project was deemed necessary because the perceived priorities and commitments of leadership did not reflect a “vibrant and life transforming faith.” The writer’s hypothesis is that by employing a multi-dimensional interventions approach, church leadership who participated in said interventions would cause an increase in the scores of the faith maturity scale. Therefore, the writer designed a program to educate and encourage the leadership toward a “vibrant and life-transforming faith.” The interventions will consist of 3 individual month long Sermon Series on faith, faith profiles and faith in action respectively. These preaching series will be taken from Hebrews 11 and the book of James. The number and length of the mini-series was considered based on the insight gleaned from an article entitled incremental Preaching written by Bryan Wilkerson. In that article, Wilkerson reveals the secrets of what he called “lasting transformation.” He outlined a three-step process he himself discovered in reading Dallas Willard. He records in this article:

¹Peter Benson, Dorothy Williams and Carolyn Ells, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute), 9.

In his book *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard unpacks the dynamics of personal transformation. He begins by informing us that ‘we live our heart.’ The heart, according to scripture, is the control center of human personality. It’s the deep, inner place where the mind, emotions, and will intersect, and where decisions are made. Our heart hearts have been malformed by our fallen world, and they need to be re-formed by the Spirit of God. This renovation of the heart, according to Willard, follows a predictable pattern involving vision, intention, and means---what he calls ‘VIM.’²

He further recorded:

In the vision phase, we come to believe that particular change is both possible and preferable. But desire alone isn’t enough to produce that change. If it were, we’d all be fit, punctual and debt-free! At some point we must decide---intend to actually get in shape, be on time, or live within our means. Having desired and decided to change, we finally need tools and practices, the means to get us to that new reality. Any attempt to effect change that ignores one or more of these phases will fail.³

He finally concluded:

The same is true for preaching and spiritual formation. Some of us focus on visionary preaching, but fail to equip people with the means to achieve what is being described. Others focus their sermons of practical application. But without a compelling vision few people will actually implement the helpful wisdom we communicate. Transformative preaching requires planning so that vision, intention, and means all find expression. But this requires having a longer view.⁴

Therefore, this project took a long view of preaching. This approach was utilized because the writer hoped that the leadership would catch the vision and desire to change. This change would not be coerced but would be volitional. The change would reflect an attitudinal and behavioral change because they believed that change was possible and

²Bryan Wilkerson, “*Incremental Preaching*” *Leadership Journal* Spring 2010, 27.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

preferable. It was the hope of the writer that the preaching would lead the leadership team to make a decision as it relates to their priorities and commitments and finally through the preaching suggest “tools and means” to assist them in embracing and incorporating the proposed changes. While this article is speaking namely of spiritual formation, it is this writers premise that faith formation is no different than spiritual formation.

In addition, a Bible study and book study was combined with the final preaching series to further enforces the teaching and preaching. The Bible Study and book study were designed and developed with the expressed purpose of taking seriously each leader’s respective learning styles. Mirroring the preaching, the teaching aspect of this project also employed incremental teaching, which was vision driven, intentional and means oriented. The teaching sought not only to inform, but also to provide the means by which the teaching could be put into practice.

Ultimately, the purpose was to be intentional about educating and encouraging the leadership team of Mount Zion Baptist Church toward a maturing faith that was vibrant and life transforming. This writer identified several questions that needed to be answered and addressed. The first question is how do the leaders understand faith? The second is what are the priorities, commitments, and perspectives that characterize a vibrant and life transforming faith. The third question is how does one assess those priorities, commitments, and perspectives?

The assessment tool selected was the Faith Maturity Scale or index. The Faith Maturity Scale was designed to measure two indicators of faith as well as denominational and congregational unity. The two indicators for faith were maturity in faith and growth in maturity in faith. Of these two indicators, it is the indicator of maturity of faith or the

“degree to which congregations members and leaders exhibit a vibrant, life-transforming faith are marked by both a deep personal relationship to a loving God and a consistent devotion to serving others.”⁵

While most congregational leadership would recognize the necessity for a faith that is both God focused and other centered, a study by the Barna Research group conducted in 2009, however, provides an ominous picture as it relates to the faith of the faithful. In his survey, Barna interviewed 3,000 participants and discovered “that congregational size is related to the nature of a congregation’s religious beliefs, religious behaviors and demographic profile.”⁶ He found that on “seven of the eight behavioral measures, attenders of large churches were substantially more likely than those of small churches to be active. This included behaviors such as attending church in the past week, reading the Bible in the past week, volunteering at their church in the past week, etc.”⁷

This was an important insight given the fact that the study found that:

Despite the substantial attention focused on Protestant mega-churches, such congregations draw about 9% of adults who frequent a Protestant church. In contrast, 41% of adults attending a Protestant church associate with a congregation of 100 or fewer adults. An additional 23% can be found at churches of 101 to 200 adults, 18% associate with bodies of 201 to 499 adults, and 9% can be found in churches of 500 to 999 adults.⁸

It further concluded that in relationship to demographics, beliefs and what they call religious behaviors, the profile, “was strikingly similar between congregations of 500

⁵Benson, *Effective Christian Education*, 9.

⁶George Barna, *How Faith Varies by Church Size*. <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/289-how-faith-varies-by-church-size> (accessed May 2011).

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

to 999 adult attenders and that of congregations drawing 1000 or more adults. Similarly, congregations with fewer than 50 adults were generally similar regarding most indicators to congregations with 50 to 100 attenders.”⁹ These findings suggest that those affiliated with larger church ministries are more apt to embody what would be described as a vibrant and life transforming faith. This is disheartening given the Biblical mandate that the “righteous are called to live by faith and not by sight” and that “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

It is interesting to note as Stone and Duke posits, “Every church community sees itself to be conducting its affairs in accord with Christian faith. What it says and does is intended to fulfill the church’s mission of bearing witness to God’s gospel in Jesus Christ and instrumenting God’s will in the world. Its words and deeds reflect what these Christians understand to be called for by their faith.”¹⁰

This is the attitude and mindset that the writer too has encountered. As the study of Barna suggests faith is understood within the narrow confines of “behaviors such as attending church in the past week, reading the Bible in the past week, volunteering at their church in the past week.” Yet it is these behaviors that our representative of an active faith. Behaviors according to the Barna research are more prominent in larger churches than in smaller churches. Regardless, however, of the size of the church Stone and Dukes insights are important to the conversation. In their own words, each church or community of faith believes that what they are doing is in accord with the Christian faith and ultimately is fulfilling the church’s mission.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 13.

It is the writer's belief from what he has witnessed in many churches is that this understanding of faith has been grossly underrepresented as important or ignored by the masses of churchgoers. This writer believes that the church has an obligation to become a community of shapers or imagers.

Chamberlain uses this language in his attempt to articulate what it means to live a life of faith as a community of faith. He powerfully contextualizes a living and vibrant faith in its shaping or imaging factor. By this he means that through our faith we are able to shape or image a world that is not yet seen but that we believe can be in faith.

In calling ourselves a people of God, in addressing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, or by responding to God as personal, we are dependent upon images of reality, which we borrow from the Christian tradition. Precisely as a response to God's word faith composes and shapes our understandings of our surrounding worlds... whatever the form, the shaping nature of faith is unmistakable, preceding conscious terms. Such recomposing is the very heart of 'prophetic ministry,' envisioning realities not yet seen. 'Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen' (Hebrews 11:1).¹¹

He further concludes that "faith is a primal force, a form of knowing derived from being in relation, participatory, communal, and compositional---these proved the sense in which faith is constitutive of the person and the world."¹² This is consistent with this writers understanding of the theology or ecclesiology of the church. Ecclesiology according to the *Handbook of Christian Theology* is defined as the "doctrine of the

¹¹Chamberlain, 10.

¹² Ibid, 10.

church, which manifests the social dimension of faith.”¹³ In other words, to understand what the church is one must understand the social dimension of faith.

Wayne Grudem speaks to this social dimension of faith by contextualizing the Church as “the community of all true believers for all time. Accordingly, he believes that this definition understands the church to be made of all those who are truly saved.” He further clarifies his point by suggesting that the term the Church applies to all those whom Christ died to redeem, all those who are saved by the death of Christ. However, he makes another important distinction regarding this social dimension of faith in that it “must also include all true believers for all time, both believers in the New Testament age and believers in the Old Testament age as well.”¹⁴ Alister McGrath in *Christian Theology* presents the social dimension of faith, which characterizes the church as (1) a spiritual society, (2) a unified body in Christ, (3) the repository of true Christian teaching, and (4) an enabler for the faithful worldwide to grow in faith and holiness.¹⁵ This writer further agrees with Shirley Guthrie that:

To believe in and follow Christ is to join the community of followers he draws around himself. To be reconciled to God in Christ is to be reconciled also with other people; it is to be led out of a sinful attempt to live in self-sufficient, autonomous isolation above, apart from, or against others, and to be drawn into the community where all barriers against others, and to be drawn into the community where all barriers that separate people from each other are broken down... to be saved is not just to be assured that I will go to heaven when I die; it is to enter into a new relationship

¹³Thorwald Lorenzen, “Ecclesiology” in *Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 140-143.

¹⁴Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 853.

¹⁵Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction 4th Edition* (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. 2007), 477.

with God and fellow human beings in the community of God's people here and now."¹⁶

This is the point Grudem is attempting to make in the article on "the nature and purposes of the Church", Grudem posits that the purposes of the church are (1) Ministry to God through worship, (2) Ministry to Believers, which he categorizes as nurture and (3) Ministry to the world through evangelism and mercy.¹⁷ It is in this area where I feel that the African American Church has been woefully negligent. The church has and continues to do an excellent job in the area of worship and fellowship, however, this has led to a church in the words of Carter G. Woodson, which has become to clerically focused and institutionally driven.¹⁸

This is problematic in the sense that it shifts the focus and distorts the function of the Church. In terms of focus, the shift moves from an Ecclesiology whose center is Jesus Christ, whose animator is the Holy Spirit, and whose mandate is to usher in the reign of God.¹⁹ Furthermore, this shift in focus creates a distorted view of the church, whereby the church rather than ushering in the reign of God in a local or even global sense becomes too inwardly focused. A distortion James Harris calls an introverted Church. For Harris a church is introverted when:

The church acts like an independent entity, divorced from the suffering of the external world. It is basically silent, peaceful, and harmonious---failing miserably to understand the need to abandon its neutrality on issues of social and political justice. The introverted church is subjective and egoistic, basking in the beauty of its bricks and mortar and the melodious syncretizing of its

¹⁶Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 355.

¹⁷Grudem, 853.

¹⁸Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 122.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 136.

chancel choirs, pipe organs, and grand pianos... This introverted behavior may contribute to numerical growth and internal excitement... it does not foster the liberation of the oppressed because the focus is too concentrated on the church as an individual institution, secure in its own rituals and practices.²⁰

This project centers on the strategies this writer believes will begin the process of moving a church from introversion to extraversion, from being inward focused to outwardly-directed.

The Context

The Mount Zion Baptist Church is a body of believers with 144 years of history as a faith community. Mount Zion Baptist Church was founded in the 1860's as a brush arbor church in the swampy areas surrounding the Pamunkey River. It was established by a group of former slaves from New Kent and Hanover County who "had no money and no means of making a living, but a burning desire to serve the true and living God, they were reassured that the same God would provide."²¹

Between 1869 and 1870, the two counties decided to separate because of the distance the two groups had to travel. The group from Hanover became what is presently known as the Mount Zion Baptist Church. The New Kent group became the Lebanon Baptist Church. In 1870, despite the institution of the Black Codes, Mount Zion moved to its current location at 2371 Piping Tree Ferry. It currently sits on land donated by the late Deacon Samuel Harris, the great grandfather of the late Mrs. Patsy Harris Tunson. The plot of land was given for the erection of an edifice to serve as a church or school house.

²⁰James Harris, *Pastoral Theology: A Black-Church Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 34-35.

²¹Mt Zion Baptist Church, www.mymzbc.org (accessed May 2011).

The first building was a log cabin. This structure served as an edifice for worship on Sundays and as a school on weekdays.²²

The Reverend George Langston from King William County, Virginia, was the first pastor. He served one year and had to retire because of his health. The first Deacons and Trustees were: Cornelius Dabney, Ben Lee, Carter Braxton, Burnette Freeman, John Carter, Samuel Harris, Louis William, John Evans, Beverly Rollinson, John Fells, and Julius Roane.

Reverend Richard Henry served as the second pastor for twenty-four years. The third pastor, Reverend Frederick Stokes, rendered one year of service.

Reverend John Lewis Brown, a member of First Shiloh Baptist Church, was the fourth pastor. In 1904, under the pastorate of Reverend Brown, the first frame building replaced the log cabin. Also, under his pastorate, the plot of ground across the road from the church was purchased for a cemetery from Deacon Julius Roane. Reverend John Lewis Brown led the congregation for twenty-seven years.

The fifth pastor, Reverend Thomas Anderson served for twenty-three years. Reverend Matthew Sykes, the sixth pastor, led the congregation for a short term. Then for the next twelve years, the seventh pastor, Reverend McClinton Waller served.

In 1967, Mount Zion called Reverend Edmond L. Sherrod to be pastor. Under his leadership, a baptismal pool was installed, new pews were purchased, the church was painted, a building fund drive was started, and blueprints for a new church were drawn. Before the baptismal pool was installed, the only method of baptizing was in

²²Mt. Zion Baptist Church, www.mymzbc.org/History (accessed May 2011).

Smith's Pond, Dandridge's Lake, or Flannagan's Mill Pond. Reverend Sherrod's mission played an important role in the church. He served the church five faithful years.

In 1973, Reverend William Russell Jones, Sr. was installed as our ninth pastor. It was during his term that time of service was changed from 11:45 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. We broke ground for our new edifice in 1976 and on Thanksgiving morning 1977, we marched into our new edifice. Reverend Jones served Mount Zion for fourteen years. Pastor Jones was later titled as Pastor Emeritus.

In 1988, our tenth pastor, Reverend Gabe Davis, II, was installed. Under Reverend Davis' leadership, many new ministries and committees were organized: Church School Teacher meeting, Young Adult Ministry, Church Leaders Committee, Brotherhood, and New Members class. The Young Adult class in Sunday school was added. Many improvements were made in the appearance of our building, including stained glass windows. On November 19, 1989, the church had the honor of sponsoring a Mortgage Burning program. In June 1993, Reverend Alice Bolden was ordained. In 1994, the church purchased fifteen (15) acres of land on Rustin Rest Lane. Reverend Davis served Mount Zion for eight years. He resigned August 25, 1996 to become pastor of the Chicago Avenue Baptist Church located in Richmond, Virginia.

On October 6, 1996, Reverend Dr. Robert L. Taylor became our Interim Pastor. In April 1997, Sister Constance Lynn was licensed to preach the gospel under his leadership.

On Sunday, October 25, 1998 with Pastor Herbert R. Plummer, of Swansboro Baptist Church of Richmond, VA presiding, the church installed their eleventh pastor, Reverend Stephen W. Pugh. Under his leadership and guidance, several were licensed

into the gospel ministry. In addition, during his tenure Pastor Pugh was instrumental in renovations inside and outside the church as well as the purchase of a new organ, two new pianos, a computer system, and a new sound system that is being utilized in spreading the gospel.

On March 29, 2009, Reverend Paul Douglas Flowers, Sr. was installed as the twelfth pastor. Under the leadership of Pastor Flowers, the Mount Zion Baptist Church continues in their efforts to advance the Kingdom of God and to be a ministry moving in the spirit of excellence.

Mount Zion has been at its current location throughout its 144-year history. The congregation just celebrated its 140th church anniversary. During that time, it has had 12 pastors of varying tenure however the average is approximately 10 years per pastoral charge. Currently Mount Zion Baptist Church (MZBC) has 250 plus members on their rosters and approximately 125 to 150 worshippers who attend the Sunday worship. There are 18 active ministries in the church. Demographically, the median age currently is 65; however, we are seeing an increase in the size of young families and in families joining our fellowship. Of the 125 to 150 who attend our services regularly, the majority are women who are also active in the church in various ministries. In fact, our most viable ministries are the Women of Virtue, the Missionaries, and the Hospitality (greeters) which are dominated by the women of Mount Zion.

Educationally, approximately 10% of the current membership earned a Bachelor's Degree. Their primary source of employment has been self-employment, medical workers, factory workers, and a handful of teachers. As the current Pastor since January 2009, the church has been lead to ratify changes to the constitution. Purchased software

to automate the administrative infrastructure of the church and to improve, expedite and make more efficient the financial recordkeeping of the church. The church body has adopted a mission, vision statement, and value system. The church has also created a website to enhance the presence and ministry effectiveness of the church. To further support the ministry of Mount Zion Baptist Church and to ensure a historical catalogue of the worship experience, a media ministry was created replete with CD and DVD recordings. The current Pastorate along with the people has also birthed a young adult Bible study and the Total Praise Worship Team.

Synergy

The writer remembers from his earliest recollection being fascinated by the stories of the Bible. He remembers having an ability to recall the stories of the heroes of our faith and was always ready to answer the questions posed by his Sunday school teachers. He loved Sunday school. Those lessons in Sunday school were supplemented by summer B. T. U and Vacation Bible School. The writer could not get enough of the lessons and the biblical stories. His teachers would tell the stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others in such a compelling way.

In April of 1975, the writer felt a tug at his heart and spirit that was so gripping and convicting, yet he did not have the language to adequately articulate it. Nevertheless, on the next Sunday at the invitation extended by Dr. Miles Jones during Sunday school he accepted the invitation to Christian Discipleship. On the first Sunday in May, he was baptized. Following his baptism on the next Sunday, he was extended the right hand of fellowship and became a member of the Providence Park Baptist Church.

Shortly after joining the church, the writer became a member of the Male youth usher board. It was as a member of that board of ushers that the older men began to share with him many of the life lessons and wisdom that have carried him through life. These men kept an eye on him and were quick to correct any behavior that was not acceptable. And where, they were not able to correct the behavior they were even quicker to illicit the help of a father, who as a Deacon of the church quick to correct. Needless to say, these concerned men would see a marked difference the following week. The writer continued to serve as an usher, however, at the age of thirteen added to his ministerial resume by joining the Inspirational Choir, which his aunt directed. This was an honor for the writer because he was there when the group was formed. The writer remembers with great joy singing the gospel songs in the early days as the choir would practice in the dining room of his maternal grandmother's house. He still remembers with fondness that house being filled with the songs of James Cleveland, Andre Crouch, and Mahalia Jackson among others. He remembers the energy of those young persons, many of whom were a pivotal part of his early development. The choir became an important part of his life during his teenage years. Even as his voice changed, the choir continued to be supportive of this writer. This writer continued to serve as an usher and a member of the Inspirational Choir until he left for the Air Force in the winter of 1988.

Upon his return from active duty service in the Air Force, the writer resumed the roles and responsibilities in the choir and on the usher board. However, his commitment was not what it was before. Despite waning commitment, this writer also began co-teaching the Senior High class during Sunday school and eventually was given his own

class to teach on the fourth Sunday of each month. This gave him a renewed sense of purpose. He also discovered he had a gift for teaching.

It was during this time of teaching that the Chairman of the Deacon board asking him to consider a call to the Diaconate Ministry approached the writer. This writer prayed and eventually answered the call to become a deacon. He immediately underwent an intense six month period of training under the newly elected Pastor Jerome Ross. Pastor Ross taught on everything from the history of the capital “C” church to his vision for our church at Providence Park. He patiently taught this writer from the depths of his heart and the vastness of his experience. His scholarship and knowledge impressed the writer. This classroom training was followed by six months of mentorship with a senior deacon. In three years, the writer would be nominated and voted as the Chairman of the Deacons ministry. It was during this tenure that the church consecrated our deaconess and we became a joint Diaconate Ministry. The writer served in that role for three years but the burden to preach was so strong that it felt like a *fire shut up in my bones*. The writer chose to ignore this impulse.

The writer was prospering in most areas of his life but there was still a nagging sense of despair. A sense that he was not complete and that there was more he should be doing. He began to pray and cry out to God through his despair and dissatisfaction. One night, while crying out and seeking the face of God, he was reminded of the previous call from God. The writer again heard the reminder that God had work for him to do. This time, however, when he heard the call the writer felt a strong impulse to answer the call. He immediately contacted the Chairman of the Diaconate board and shared with him what he felt lead to do for the Lord. He in turn told Dr. Ross. After meeting with Dr.

Ross, he was instructed to put his call experience in writing. This took the writer several weeks but he would not be deterred. Dr. Ross also told him that he needed to obtain a Bachelor's degree and Masters of Divinity degree before he would be licensed to preach. This revelation did not discourage this writer. He spoke to his wife, who told him that if he felt that strongly about the call then he should apply at once to Virginia Commonwealth University.

In the fall of 1998, the writer enrolled in the Religious Studies Program at Virginia Commonwealth University. It was at V. C. U. that his confidence grew and calling began to take shape. It was at V. C. U that he first encountered the Black Liberation Theology of James Cone, Gayraud Wilmore, Cornel West, and others. It was at V. C. U that he first wrestled with the thoughts of Karl Marx. It was also at V. C. U. that he had the opportunity to deliver his first lecture as well as present his first academic paper. The writer's first academic paper was the result of his participation in the 24th annual African-American Studies Conference at Olive-Harvey College in Chicago Illinois. During the conference he, as a student, presented a paper entitled, "Faith Based Initiatives: The temptation to serve two masters." In this paper, he asserted that the faith-based initiative, as proposed by President Bush, was not the model of Christian pragmatism it was touted to be but rather an initiative advanced by a conservative political religious right seeking to advance a divisive political agenda. He further asserted that the Black Church needed to be careful not to be co-opted into this divisive, conservative agenda.

As stated above, he was also afforded the opportunity to present his first lecture that was the result of an independent study on the book of Psalms. In the independent

study, the writer had his first glimpse of form criticism and other biblical criticisms. As a result of my study, he discovered that the writer had an affinity and aptitude for Biblical scholarship. He even received an award from the American Bible Society. In addition to these opportunities, he also received several academic awards and merits while matriculating at V. C. U. The writer graduated from V. C. U. in 2002. Despite the nascent abilities of Biblical Scholarship, he also began to consider other career options. He was seriously beginning to doubt whether the church could speak to the issues and pathologies that affected the masses. The writer began to entertain the possibility that he might better serve his people in the legal/judicial arena. As a result, he contemplated applying to Harvard Law School and the law school at the University of Richmond. He also applied to seminary at Proctor School of Theology, Baptist Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary. He further considered applying to the Africana Studies program at Howard University. By this time, his family had expanded to include three children. As a result, the decision was made to accept the first letter received and to pursue that course of study. This decision would be cemented by an undeniable, unshakable sense of calling.

In September 2002, the writer began theological studies at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. A year later, Reverend Dr. James Sailes licensed him to preach at the Antioch Baptist Church. He immediately began to receive preaching engagements and worked to develop the gift of preaching. In addition to preaching, attending seminary and pursuing the normal course load he began to read heavily in the areas of homiletics, spirituality, and theology. The writer read extensively Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton, Catie Cannon, Sam Roberts, and Howard Thurman. It was in reading these spiritual

giants that he began to fashion a vision for an engaged spirituality, which would nourish the soul as well as provide persons with the spiritual resources to enrich their lives and engage the world around them. In reflecting upon what he was reading, the writer began to look more closely at what he had been taught about God and Jesus. What he soon discovered is that the reading on spirituality and prayer was for his benefit as much as anyone else. Suddenly and without much warning, he reached a spiritual plateau.

The writer was on the cusp of a crisis of faith. He began to suffer from a deep melancholy and depression that resonated from the depth of his soul. Although he was licensed and preaching at this point, he had no joy or peace. He remembers being in a spiritual funk for at least two years. He continued to function socially but spiritually he was empty. By this time on the spiritual journey, the writer began to entertain the notion of obtaining a staff position in a church as a church administrator, assistant pastor or even a youth pastor.

In addition to theological studies, he began to read books in those areas to ensure that if the time came he would be ready. During that time, he received two promising interviews the first at an Anglo-Saxon church located in a community surrounded by a large African American and Latino community. The writer's resume was accepted and he sat through several interviews first with the pastor and then with the Deacons and finally with a nominating committee. He even met with the youth of the church at a cookout, attended, and actively participated in worship with them.

However, in the final interview the question of race came up. The question arose as to whether he would feel comfortable worshipping and providing leadership within a largely Anglo congregation. The writer did his best to assure and re-assure them that his

experience in Seminary had prepared him for any challenges he might face. Nevertheless, the process grinded to a halt and he was back to square one.

The second interview for a youth pastor position was on the staff of one of Richmond's fastest growing churches. As before, the writer made it through all the preliminaries, and was now prepared to sit before a committee and field questions about his management style, leadership philosophy and theological understanding of youth ministry.

The writer felt he did well and in fact, years later was told that he had done so well that some in the meeting began to question why they couldn't find someone within the ministry as confident and competent as he seemed to be. Once again, his hopes were dashed and dreams deferred. Each "no" he received took something away from me. Each closed door made him more hesitant and less sure about his calling. It was frustrating. It chiseled away at his confidence and sought to erode him emotionally and spiritually.

The irony of the situation did not escape him. Here he was in seminary with folk who have been on church staffs it seems since they graduated high school. They were working in environments that understood the call to ministry and afforded them time off and financial assistance to further their calling. Many of them were serving as Pastors of churches but it didn't seem that they had any passion for what they were doing. And here he was with his call story and no one was calling him. Here he was with the audacious claim that God had dared to call him to ministry but every door he entered was quickly closed. Every opportunity that seemed promising quickly evaporated.

The writer quickly became disillusioned and disgruntled with the seminary because it seemed that there was not support afforded to the minority population. No

pulpit vacancies. No job opportunities. He increasingly became bitter and for the last six months of his seminary education did not interact with anyone on campus outside of his professors. He wholeheartedly believes that if he had not graduated when he did he would have formed a minority student organization just to give legitimacy to his anger. In reflection, the writer now understands that his anger was birthed out of his angst and anxiety about what the next step in the journey would be. The writer now realizes that he was so preoccupied with securing a job that he failed to enjoy the journey. He recognizes that he was so fixated on becoming a church administrator, a youth pastor, a chaplain that he failed to just be. The one thing he vowed not to do in seminary, namely lose a sense of whom he was seemed to be the very thing that almost happened. Thank God for Divine Mercy!

Nevertheless, he graduated seminary and continued to preach at every opportunity. He also began the implementation of Greater Works Outreach Ministries of Virginia. It became the umbrella organization for his preaching and teaching ministry. However, by this time he felt a compelling sense of calling to the pastoral ministry. It was amazing how God had revealed His vision for his life and how he had come to this place. The next two years of his life, were spent preaching in various churches and waiting, oftentimes impatiently on God.

The writer kept hearing that God was preparing a people for him to shepherd but must admit he didn't want to hear that. It sounded so clichés. It sounded empty and trite. He even participated on a church plant that sought to be a ministry of reconciliation. This community of multi-cultural seminary students desired to be a church of diversity in the

Richmond area. The writer quickly became disillusioned and distanced himself from this upstart ministry.

What the writer now understands is that he didn't fully understand the emergent church model and was not comfortable with all of its manifestations. He knew he wanted to do church unusual and unique but sensed in his spirit that that movement was not the way to realize that ideal. He had experienced another failure in ministry. The writer could not understand what God was doing. He wondered if he had prepared himself for nothing or for the wrong thing. For a while, teaching undergraduate classes at Virginia Commonwealth University appeased the writer. This was an adjunct position that started a couple of years earlier. He enjoyed teaching freshmen and sophomores the various world religions and belief systems. He also had the opportunity to teach introductory classes in African American studies. The writer felt like he was making a difference. He felt like his presence there mattered. Above all, he was thankful. Yet, he still believed that God was calling him to fulltime pastorate. Despite this certainty, the writer felt he was going to spend the rest of his adult life, filling pulpits but never being called to a pastorate of his own. These were very depressing years for him. He fell into the trap of telling God how the story would end.

The impulse to pastor was just so strong that he knew that this was God's desire for his life. He just did not know how and when it would happen. And with each passing week, he began to wonder if it would ever happen. His wife attempted to allay some of the concerns by sending out resumes and cover letters on his behalf but each "no thank you" letter only sought to discourage him even more. The one interview he did receive ended with the congregation of 40 congregants split between the writer and the other

candidate. It was of little consolation. The pain was inflicted. He felt like a child again being rejected by my father. He felt like a twenty something young man whose heart was broken by the women the writer thought he would marry. It would be an understatement to say he was hurt; the writer was devastated.

Compounding the devastation was the report from his primary care physician that he was referring the writer to the Virginia Cancer Institute because of a concern he noted with his blood screening. The writer was not prepared for what he would be told next. It was communicated to him that his white blood cells were dangerously low, specifically, those cells that fought off viruses and infections in the body. He was told that his autoimmune system was compromised. He was also told they wanted to monitor his blood for an extended period of time to see if his count would relegate itself. The writer was told if they did not stabilize, he would be forced to undergo a battery of tests and procedures. Every two months, he would go and get a finger prick and wait anxiously for the results. Each time, the report was the same. His blood cells were either killing themselves or dying prematurely. Either way, he was susceptible to viruses and infections.

The writer was told that if in six months his numbers did not rebound he would have to take an HIV test and if that came back negative, they would order a bone marrow biopsy. The numbers never rebounded so additional test, were ordered and each returned negative. The Doctor diagnosed with neutropenia, a condition whereby the virus fighting white blood cells are not produced in sufficient quality. It is a reality, which he will have to live with for the rest of his life. He was told that if he ever got a fever, he was supposed to report to the emergency room immediately. While that prognosis is not

promising, for the last three years the writer been standing on the promises of God. Needless to say, 2007 was an interesting year for him but it was about to become more interesting.

In the fall of 2007, a mutual friend shared with the writer that a church was searching for a pastor and accepting resumes. He asked me for a resume. By this time, the writer had resigned to the fact that he might not ever pastor and was not sure he still wanted to. It took two weeks of prodding before the writer responded to this request. The writer approached the request as an opportunity to preach. Much to his surprise, the writer received a phone call from the pulpit committee chairperson asking him to submit a tape of a sermon. The writer indicated that he would but knew in his heart that he didn't want to subject himself to being hurt again.

In seminary while studying for his Masters of Divinity degree, it became part of the writers practice to read several magazines, in particular, *Preaching*, *The African American Pulpit* and *Ministry Today*. One day he read an interview with Dr. Robert Smith from Beeson Divinity School. He always admired Dr. Smith's preaching because he was able to preach without notes and was so engaging. The writer read that interview on that particular day to see if he could glean any nuggets about how he too might be able to develop that gift. What he found in that interview excited and energized the writer in a way that he had not been before. In that article the interviewer asked him if he could have read in a particular area more to enhance his preaching, what would it be? Dr. Smith responded that if he would have read more in the area of theology. He intimated that that singular practice would have strengthened his preaching. The writer pondered that insight for months and determined that perhaps God was not saying "no" to pulpit ministry but

maybe “not yet. Armed with a renewed sense of purpose, he applied to the Ph.D. program at Union Theological Seminary to study theology. He met with the Director of admissions who advised me to speak with two prominent African- American scholars about my research interest. He crossed every “T” and dotted every “I”. He was preparing himself to be a student again. He began reading every book on theology he could find. He was devouring the books of Dr. Brian Blount, Dr. Samuel Roberts and Dr. Catie Cannon. He read Paul Tillich, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was also reading selected passages from a text on Systematic Theology. The writer even began theologically reflecting in his journals. He was so sure that he would not be called to the church and that he would be engaging in full-time theological studies. Although he still secretly held out hope that he would be called to the pastorate of Mount Zion Baptist Church.

The writer felt at home and comfortable in the pulpit of Mount Zion almost immediately. The people were welcoming and accommodating and seemed to show a genuine interest in the writer. They also seemed to enjoy the messages he was preaching. He was invited twice during the months between January and March in 2008. He felt good about the possibilities and was sure that he would be one of the final candidates for the pastorate. However, after the last engagement, he didn’t hear from the church at all. The writer feared that this would be a repeat of his previous experiences. What had he done wrong? Where had he missed the mark and miscalculated? The questions nagged him day and night. The few persons who knew what was going on were asking the writer questions for which he had no answers. Their response was always the same, “don’t worry just trust God” or some variation of those oft used and well-worn words of encouragement. The truth of the matter was he was worried. What the writer discovered

throughout that process was that his identity was tied into his role as a minister. He as well as others had begun to see him through the narrow lens of the ministry. Outside of the ministry he had no identity. As a result, he was behaving and acting in ways, which he pretended were authentic but were really antithetical to who he was. He quickly discovered that he was acting in ways that would allow him to be accepted by others. The challenge was to reclaim his authenticity. This revelation and realization was difficult to accept and even more difficult to rectify.

The writer was now known as Reverend Paul Flowers, Sr., licensed and ordained for the Gospel Ministry. It seemed increasingly that he had no life outside of that reality. His life consisted of those things he used to do, those things he wanted to do and those things that he knew church folk wouldn't understand if he were brave enough to do them. It seemed the latest foray into the choppy waters of pastoral ministry were about to claim another victim but at least he still had an ace up my sleeve---returning to school and continuing his theological education.

The writer received the letter from Union Theological Seminary a few days before his birthday in May. He was so excited. He expected to read words of congratulation and welcome. However, the letter indicated that the program was not accepting anymore persons for the Doctoral Studies Program. He was devastated again. He could not understand what God was doing in his life. It seemed that at every turn he was running into one roadblock after another. He again found himself at a crossroad. He continued to trust God but was having a difficult time figuring out what God wanted from him. Needless to say, the writer entered into another period of melancholy and depression. He began to seriously consider the possibility that he had made a mistake.

Perhaps he had not heard from God. The preaching engagements kept coming and for a while, the writer considered becoming a traveling evangelist or revivalist. He was slowly resigning to the possibility that he would be like so many persons he knew who went to seminary but only to earn an advanced degree.

This was tantamount to a person who went to law school but didn't practice law or medical school and did not practice medicine. It was pointless. What good was it to have all of this information and a passion for sharing it but no one with which to share? In June, he received a call from the pulpit committee chair that they wanted to extend an invitation for me to come out and share for two weeks in August.

The writer would be responsible for preaching on Sunday morning and teaching Bible study on Wednesday. He was excited but cautious. It was during that August intensive that he felt God was knitting hearts together. He felt a connection with the people that was undeniable. However, he would have to wait 90 days before he discovered what their decision would be concerning the pastorate. On November 11, 2009, he was called to the pastorate and became the 12th pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, VA.

The interaction within the ministerial context revealed that the church, inadvertently or purposely had become what Dr. James Harris had aptly and appropriately described as an introverted church. This was problematic one, because of the call to "Go into all the world!" and two, because what was realized was a catalogue of ministries that were all inverted and positioned to serve the body exclusively. However, in private conversations and consultations, it became evident that many in the congregation were yearning to extend ministry beyond the walls of the church and the

confines of the County. This was exciting and provided the impotence for the advent of several outreach projects such as the collection of gently used shoes in partnership with a local shoe retailer. A greater emphasis on our ministry to persons confined to Nursing Homes. The resurrection of a ministry designed to teach the Bible to young men and women incarcerated in Juvenile detention centers. While the writer was excited by this realization and nominal reaction, the enthusiasm of this pastor was tempered by the fact that more could be done if only greater participation could be generated. It again proved the wisdom of the late Dr. Miles Jones, who understood:

There is no naturally direct and mutual relationship between a church seeing needs of the community in which the church resides and the church accepting the responsibility for the fulfillment of those needs. History and our everyday life experiences constantly remind us that seeing needs does not contain enough potency to motivate people to become responsible for fulfilling, addressing or meeting needs that have entered into their consciousness.²³

It was this realization that spoke to the writers understanding of what the church collective should be about theologically. While historically and theologically, the writer attempted to address this apathetic redress through the creation of a church vision and mission statement, he also sought to root it scripturally. Notwithstanding the historical and theological underpinning, this writer understood the necessity for a scriptural foundation that would ultimately be formational for the community at large. The writer relied heavily on the proverbial wisdom, which reminds us that without a vision the people cast of restraint. In other words, they do what they want to do. This mindset is antithetical to the Kingdom of God. Likewise, the Habakkuk exhortation to “write the vision and to make it plain.” It was imperative that we had a clear direction articulated in

²³Terry Thomas, “*Mobilizing a Congregation*” (Lecture, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, January 19, 2010).

the language of vision and found in the lexicon of missions to both center us and synergize us. What the writer needed to express upon the membership is that multiple visions were detrimental to the work God had assigned for them to do. Ultimately, the fact had to be impressed and embraced that multiple visions lead to division in the church. It leads to what Paul identifies as “self interest” in Philippians. The writer, having established the need for a vision and the unifying power of vision and mission, next sought to synthesize the message of the vision by contextualizing the vision in the commissions of Jesus in Matthew 28:16-20 and Mark 16:15-16 as the foundational scriptures for the vision and mission of the church, which merely marked a reclamation of our true calling.

Ultimately, this writer identified a need for the development of the church leadership in some measurable way. Scripturally, the writer was embracing and advocating the modality of Jesus and his development of his disciples as outlined in the Gospel narratives. Furthermore, undergirding this writers theology was the understanding of Ephesians 4, that suggests that as Pastor the task was to “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”²⁴

In short, the writer has sensed God moving on his head and heart as he unfolds a vision of building the people through the word and not mere building projects. God has placed in his heart a passion for edifying the body of Christ and preparing them for the work of ministry. The writer senses God calling him and indeed the capital “C” church to develop and deploy disciples. It has been interesting to see people grow in the Word of

²⁴Eph 4:12-13 (NIV).

God and in their relationship with God and others. This will be vitally important as we continue to process of developing disciples who develop disciples. The writer understands that this will not be an easy cultural shift. Nevertheless, he senses as strongly as he sensed the initial calling that it is a shift that must occur.

The writer, as pastor has even declared that the next three years are years of discipleship. Therefore, we have held workshops on what the mission and mandate of the church has to be if it truly is a reflection of what God intended. The writer has taught this concept in workshops, leadership summits, as well as Bible study. He have preached about the requirements, responsibilities, and rewards of discipleship and prayerfully trusted the Holy Spirit to shift the culture to embrace the mandate of Matthew 28.

The writer suspects that his experience in this program will ultimately lead to the development of a model, which speaks to the development of disciples generationally. This is where he feels the spirit leading but will trust the process. Thus far, it has been a journey that he is thankful to be on and looks forward with great anticipation to what God has in store for the members, the ministers, and the ministries of Mount Zion Baptist Church.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF ART IN MINISTRY

In approaching this ministry project the writer realized that it was important that he grasped the relevant literature and understood the language related to the proposed project. Additionally, the writer wanted to be able to intelligently enter into the ongoing discussions that were taking place in the academy and the church directly related to the proposed project. This chapter highlights the relevant materials that were identified as germane to the discussion of faith, faith development, and faith maturity.

Faith

Gerrit Immink in his work, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction* explores faith as a reality to be lived. He posits an active faith is a faith, which “involves a dynamic relationship, or dialogue, with God. Of particular interest is the chapter dedicated to “How faith and life interconnect.” In that chapter, he posits, “faith is a dynamistic factor that intensifies our relationship to our world.”¹ The writer tends to agree with that assessment of faith. This view is also held by Kenneth Stokes in *Faith is a Verb* also argues and powerfully illustrates the point that faith should be dynamic and evolving rather than “static, rigid and inflexible.” In this important text he develops the concept of *faithing* and explores the role of faith throughout the various experiences of

¹F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

life as well as the life cycles of Adults. He further explores how faith is developed within the church context.² This author selected this book because of its input into faith development within the church.

Paul Tillich in his text *Dynamics of Faith* provided an intriguing definition of faith, in which he contextualizes faith as the “state of being ultimately concerned.” The remainder of the book is concerned with exploring the symbols, truths, and life of faith. This writer selected this book because of Tillich’s insightful discussion of the community of faith and its importance in the development and expression of faith.³

Marcus Borg in *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* seeks to provide the modern believer with a way of seeing the traditions and life practices of Christianity. One way he does that, which proved beneficial to this writer was by providing insight into the varied ways in which faith has been understood throughout the history of Christianity. He identifies four meanings, which will be explored in greater detail later in this document. However, this writer is indebted to this scholar for his ability to clearly explain and express the meaning of faith.⁴

Faith Development

In his important text *Growing in the Life of Faith*, Craig Dykstra argues for the incorporation of experience and education to foster and facilitate the life of faith. He further posits that one’s desire to live a “faithful life” but perhaps lack the necessary

²Kenneth Stokes, *Faith is a Verb* (Mystic, CT: Twenty Third Publications, 1989).

³Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1957).

⁴Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Reclaiming a Life of Faith* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003).

resources or proper understanding to accomplish said ends. He clearly understands that faith and the life of faith are dynamic and evolving, which requires the assistance of Christian Educators throughout that dynamic process. Dykstra in supporting these arguments looks at the dynamic of faith and human development as well as the role that the community plays in the overall development of faith.⁵

This is further explored in other works of Fowler. For instance, *In Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith*, Fowler illustrates how communities of faith can help to shape and support others in their development of faith. Of primary importance to this writer was the chapter on “Faith Development Theory and the Human Vocation.” In this chapter, Fowler looks specifically at the development of faith as it is theorized and the vocation of humans as it is actualized.⁶

In *Weaving the New Creation*, Fowler again returns to the theme of what kind of churches we are called to be in this decade and the twenty first century? In seeking to answer these questions, Fowler again looks at the dynamics of faith development with an additional caveat of what he calls the Divine praxis and the God praxis. In addition, he further explores the stages of faith consciousness and posits how a public church functions and is ultimately formed through a process he calls Ecclesiogenesis. For Fowler, ecclesiogenesis is the task of forming personal and public faith.⁷

⁵Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*. 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999).

⁶James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., 2000).

⁷James W. Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1991), 128.

In the 2004 article "*Faith Development at 30: Naming the Challenges of Faith in a New Millennium*," James Fowler the pioneer of Faith Development theory and research reflects upon thirty years of faith development theory and research in light of the challenges of Faith in a New Millennium. He recounts the beginning of faith development theory and traces the ongoing research as he simultaneously posits the challenges and critical issues of the theory he has championed since its inception. This writer found helpful his discussion of Faith Development, Faith Education, and Religious Practices.⁸

Another important work in the area of faith development was James Fowler's *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*. It represents and reflects Fowlers recent research and contributions to the discussion of faith maturity and development. In this work, Fowler examines the relationship between practical theology and pastoral care. Fowler further posits there are two primary areas of the congregation's work, namely, the care and cure of souls and the formation and transformation of persons."⁹ It is in this important work where Fowler drawing upon the work of Martin Marty and Parker Palmer advocates the understanding of the vocation of the public church. He identifies four characteristics of the public church:

1. The public church is deeply and particularly Christian
2. The public church is committed to Jesus Christ, under the sovereignty of God that is prepared to pursue its mission in the contest of a pluralistic society.

⁸James Fowler, "Faith Development at 30: Naming the Challenges of Faith in a New Millennium," *Religious Education* 99 (2004): 405-421.

⁹James Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care: Theology and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 20.

3. A public church is one in which the encouragement of intimacy within its community and the concern for family feeling are balanced by care about the more impersonal and structural domains of public life.
4. A public church is one unafraid of engagement with the complexities and ambiguities of thought and ideologies in this age of ideological pluralism.¹⁰

The contributions of Fowler and the insights shared in this work have proven informative and important for the implementation of this project.

Another work consulted was a lecture entitled *Faith Development Theory: A Case for Paradigm Change* by the Reverend Dr. David Heywood of Oxford, England. This writer found of particular significance his discussion of the failings and shortcomings of the Faith Development Theory. Namely, what he calls its quintessentially modernistic features. He also took issue with its reliance on “an ordered sequence of stage-like progression.”¹¹ This lecturer's counter arguments pertaining to Faith Development Theory allowed this writer to enter into the conversation related to Faith Development Theory in a balanced and informed way.

Faith Maturity

Peter L. Benson, Dorothy Williams, and Carolyn Eklin conducted a study in 1990 sponsored by the Search Institute entitled *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*. This report outlines the results of a national study conducted utilizing six protestant mainline denominations. The purpose of the study was to evaluate and strengthen congregationally based Christian Education. This project

¹⁰Ibid., 24.

¹¹David Heywood, “*Faith Development Theory: A Case for Paradigm Change*” (Lecture, Oxford, England).

according to its authors had five major purposes. They were to: assess adults' and adolescents', Christian educators, pastors and other adults, assess loyalty both congregationally and denominationally, establish features of congregational life that promote faith maturity and loyalty, document the role of Christian Education In the growth of mature faith and loyalty and implement national strategies that enabled congregations to strengthen their own Christian education programming.¹²

An additional academic paper written by Benson, etc. entitled, "*The Faith Maturity Scale: Conceptualization, Measurement and Empirical Validation*." In this academic paper describes the development of the Faith Maturity Scale, which measures eight core dimensions of faith maturity and thirty-eight indicators of those dimensions. This article was selected by this writer because of its focus on the typology of faith maturity, which speaks to not only the horizontal dimension of faith but also the vertical dimension, which is reflected in our relationships to others and our willingness to partner with God in his work of redemption.¹³

Faith Formation

Sondra Higgins Matthaei's work *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* articulates a vision of faith formation drawn from the tradition of John Wesley. In this important work, she advocates the adoption of ecology of formation,

¹²Peter Benson, Dorothy Williams, and Carolyn Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1990).

¹³Peter Benson, Michael J. Donahue, and Joseph A. Erickson. "The Faith Maturity Scale: Conceptualization, Measurement and Empirical Validation," *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 5 (1993): 1-26.

by which she speaks to the interconnectedness of formative elements.¹⁴ Specifically, she calls for the creation of a Wesleyan ecology of formation that is inclusive of “preaching and witnessing, ongoing instruction and nurture, pastoral care, opportunities for service and fellowship.”¹⁵ This ecological development is the domain of Christian Education.

In her later book, *Formation in Faith*, Matthaei returns to her early theme of faith formation. She also revisits the import of Christian education in Christian Faith Formation. She reminds the reader in this text that “the ministry of Christian Education addresses the tasks of shaping Christian identity and vocation through faith formation by helping us develop our relationship with God so that we may witness to our love for God by loving our neighbor.”¹⁶ The whole premise of this work is the creation of a congregational ministry dedicated to the making of disciples. She understands that discipleship is predicated upon the practice of faith formation. This practice of faith formation in Matthaei’s schema is best supported and sustained within community.

Marian Plant, in her book *Faith Formation in Vital Congregations* narrows her focus by advocating a more intentional focus on faith formation through Christian education. She writes, “like Siamese twins, Christian education and Christian formation are inseparable and, at their best, nearly indistinguishable.”¹⁷ Likewise, Jane Regan in her book, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* advocates asking about “the

¹⁴Sondra Matthaei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 33.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁷Marian R. Plant, *Faith Formation in Vital Congregations* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2009), 18.

elements that contribute to the faith formation of the entire parish community.”¹⁸ While, Regan’s focus is on formation through Christian Education, she differs from Plant in that she is willing to explore other options or what she calls alternatives to faith formation. By exploring alternatives she was seeking to engender “critical reflection on our present meaning perspectives.”¹⁹ It is also interesting to note that she advocates the church become a learning community.²⁰

Robert Schnase in the *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* also advocates for what he calls intentional faith development. While writing from and for a United Methodist context, his work makes an important contribution to the conversation of faith maturity through faith formation. In fact, he writes “vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice intentional Faith development.”²¹ He argues:

Churches that practice Intentional Faith Development offer high quality learning experiences that help people understand scripture, faith, and life in the supportive nurture of caring relationships. Sunday school classes, Bible studies, short-term topical studies, support groups that apply faith to particular life challenges, children’s church, Vacation Bible School, United Methodist Women, camps, retreats, and youth fellowship groups are only a few of the countless ways by which churches help people probe God’s will for their lives and for the world, and bring people together to strengthen the Body of Christ by building friendships and relationships. Christian disciples strive to develop faith and grow in Christ-likeness through study and learning, and God is best able to form disciples when people do this together and not by themselves.²²

¹⁸Jane E. Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁹Regan, 90.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 113.

²¹Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 62.

²²*Ibid.*

For Schnase this intentionality would ultimately lead to a healthy congregation, whose faith D. N. A would consist of not only intentional faith development but also of “radical hospitality, passionate worship, risk-taking mission and service as well as extravagant generosity.”²³

Robert Keely edited a work entitled *Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults*.²⁴ This text is important to the research for this project because of two essays in particular. The first essay entitled “Wide and Long and High and Deep” provided the authors Biblical foundation of Faith Formation. This writer appreciated Syd Hielema’s assertion regarding the “activity of faith formation.” In that essay, Heilema contextualizes the activity of faith formation in five dimensions. The first being that faith formation takes place together with all the saints, secondly, that faith formation involves lifelong maturation, thirdly that faith formation is paradoxical, fourthly that faith formation requires spiritual disciplines and finally that faith formation requires Biblical Literacy.²⁵

The five dimensions posited in this essay were informative to the thinking of the writer. The multi-dimensional approach employed in this project, were the direct result of the writers interpretation of Heilema’s assertions. Another influence on the thinking of this writer and the implementation of this project was the essay by Don Richter. In his essay, Richter spoke of a concept called practice shaped beliefs. For Richter these practices were where faith begins. The rationalization for these four practices were

²³Ibid.

²⁴Robert J. Keeley, ed. *Shaped By God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2005).

²⁵Keeley, 16.

outlined as follows, first they were resilient, they held practitioners accountable, they strengthened the wider communities practices and ultimately shaped the practitioners practice.²⁶

This writer, however, found Richard Osmer's work on "Teaching for Faith" the most insightful and informative. It was in Osmer that the writer found a supporting rubric or framework for his conceptualization of a multi-dimensional approach. In this work, Osmer speaks of the "faith cube."²⁷ More specifically, he speaks of teaching to the faith cube, which required teaching for belief, relationship, commitment, and mystery.²⁸

What this writer found foundational was that Osmer advocated varying methods for each objective. In other words, if one were teaching for belief, he advocated a lecture format.²⁹ For Relationships, he proposed using a discussion-based format.³⁰ In the chapter on teaching for commitment, Osmer suggests the utilization of the participant's life story as the primary teaching model.³¹ Finally, Osmer advocates the usage of parables or short stories to teach regarding the mystery of faith.³² Each chapter outlined above offers helpful tips and insights into how to apply the principles proposed.

²⁶Keeley, 28-29.

²⁷Richard Robert Osmer, *Teaching for Faith: A Guide for Teachers of Adult Classes* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 21.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Osmer, 39.

³⁰Osmer, 68.

³¹Osmer, 106.

³²Osmer, 153.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The focus of this section is to establish a theoretical foundation for assessing and developing the faith maturity of the leadership of a local congregational context. The biblical, theological, and historical components outlined and discussed in this section will provide the foundation upon which this ministry model will be established, developed, and implemented.

This theoretical foundation is communicated through preaching, teaching, and seminar. The writer focused on preaching a series of sermons from Hebrews 11 and a series on Abraham as presented in Hebrews, entitled “profiles in Faith” as well as a series of sermons from the Book of James called *IFaith* or interactive faith. The preaching series in James was supplemented by a Bible Study that allowed the leadership to delve deeper into and further wrestle with the issues of faith in action. The leadership also read and dialogued in smaller group settings around the book entitled *Crazy Faith*.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Origen and Augustine as well as the protestant reformers, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and Martin Luther, build the historical foundation of this project on the defining of faith. The particular influence of Zwingli, Calvin, and Luther led to the protestant

reformation. This reformation laid the foundation for what became known as the “protestant ethic.” It was this “protestant ethic” which led to the “puritan ethos.” It was this “puritan ethos” that impacted the theology of John Wesley. This section will explore the development of faith along that historical continuum and seek to establish the understanding of faith within its historical context.

For this writer, the historical foundation of this paper begins within the Patristic period of the early church, particularly in the thinking and writing of Origen. It was Origen who understood faith as a “necessary pre-condition for receiving the grace of justification.”¹ According to Scheck, “throughout his commentary Origen insists that faith and works are equally necessary for salvation. One with the other is condemned, ‘seeing that faith without works is called dead (Jas 2:17, 26); and no one is justified before God by works without faith.’”² This observation led Scheck to conclude that for Origen “faith and works cleave to one another and are consummated.”³ While the specific works are not defined by Origen, it is a significant insight given the emphasis on “works.” However, according to Scheck Origen’s citation of the thief on the cross does provide a suggestive example of what he meant. Scheck writes regarding Origen and that passage:

The current passage seems to make clear, however, that even in the case of the thief, both his faith and his works contributed to his justification. Initially, he was justified by faith alone in the sense that Jesus freely forgave him his past crimes and demanded no antecedent works before this first justification. But his faith was effective in the just works of publicly confessing the Lordship of

¹Thomas Scheck, “*Justification By Faith Alone In Origen’s Commentary On Romans And Its Reception During The Reformation Era*,” <http://209.61.179.205/documents/scripture/ScheckJustFaithinOrigenRomans1.pdf> (accessed May 2011).

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Christ and rebuilding the other thief who was blaspheming, and therefore, have been liberated by divine grace, this robber deserved to be justified.⁴

Clearly for Origen faith requires corresponding action or works. This Patristic Father understood the necessity for wedding our profession with practical applications. For Origen faith and works is a both/and proposition. Likewise, Augustine viewed faith and works as a both/and proposition. Anthony Meredith remarks that it is easy to portray Augustine as an “either/or” man, whereas he is in fact a “both/and” one. It is not a question of contemplation or action in this life, but both; not faith or works, but faith and works; or again, not faith or reason, but faith and reason, with the important proviso that we must make sure that first things come first.”⁵ For Augustine, like Origen before him faith was of primary importance and significance.

Faith and the Reformation

The reformers also wrestled with faith as foundationally important. Martin Marty in *A Short History of Christianity* ascertains that the “reformers did not intend to repudiate the communal and churchly character of God’s redemptive activity. They did not intend to invent autonomous man. They merely wanted faith, and not the institutional church, to be the rock: here man would stand before God in confession of Christ.”⁶ In fact, Marty declares that for the reformers faith was all that mattered. For these church reformers, “justification by faith, later a slogan and party word, was originally the vital

⁴Ibid.

⁵Anthony Meredith, “Augustine’s Thinking Faith,” *Online Journal of the British Jesuits*, (March 2008). http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20080828_1.htm (accessed May 28, 2011).

⁶Marty Martin, *A Short History of Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 216.

center.”⁷ For the reformers “faith is not mere assent to truth propositions about God. It means being grasped by the message of faith and the reality of God in Christ. It remains a gift of God, not an achievement of man.”⁸ The reformers understood faith as a reality to be “grasped” not merely intellectually but also practically.

Clearly, Zwingli understood that faith was to be practiced. By practice, he understood faith as essential to “worship.” In other words, “one’s actions and one’s belief could not be separated: The one did not exist autonomously of the other.”⁹ To further clarify his views, Wandel contextualizes Zwingli’s perspective:

Like all Protestants, Zwingli held that faith could not be acquired, but came, as a gift freely given, from God: No act or desire of any human being could bring faith to him or her. And that faith led one into community: God’s presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit moved the faithful to enter the community of Christians specifically in order to practice their faith. A community was the context, for Zwingli, within which each Christian expressed his or her faith. Faith led one to love one’s “neighbor”: to enter into the sort of relations of obligation from which the true Christian community was forged. Faith could only be practiced, for Zwingli and thereby strengthened, with the community of Christians.¹⁰

Fellow Reformer John Calvin also spoke to the duality of faith, albeit from a slightly different perspective. In his *Institutes* he spoke of two kinds of faith. The first, kind of faith was related to what one believed about God. However, he argued that this type of faith was not sufficient because in his words “if any man should boast of such a

⁷Ibid., 215.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Lee Palmer Wandel, “Zwingli and Reformed Practice” in *Educating People of Faith: Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities*, ed. John Van Engen (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 270-293.

¹⁰Ibid., 286-287.

faith, let him understand that he has it in common with the devils.”¹¹ The other kind of faith, to which Calvin refers, is “when we believe, not only that God and Christ exist, but also believe in God and in Christ, truly acknowledging God as our God and Christ as our Savior.”¹² For Calvin, God and the Christ are the beginning and ending of faith. They are the objects of our faith. Therefore, naturally the word of God is the object and target of faith; it is that “which faith ought to take aim.”¹³ Ultimately, Calvin’s theology could be framed in the following formula of patient hope and restrained faith. By this construction, he argued “we must keep our faith buttressed by patient hope.”¹⁴ In other words, our faith is supported by a patient hope in a God that is intimately involved and ultimately concerned about us. It is upon this God that we are called in faith to hope in and on. Conversely he spoke of a faith that restrains us to the extent that we are able to hope and wait patiently. Calvin understood that this kind of faith required more than intellectual assent. He understood that it was imperative that faith finds residence in the heart as well as in the head. Yet, he understood the challenge of this faith proposition. In fact, he asserted “it is harder for the heart to be furnished with assurance than for the mind to be endowed with thought.”¹⁵

Martin Luther, a contemporary of Zwingli and Calvin, in his “*Introduction to St. Paul’s letter to the Romans*” wrote concerning faith:

¹¹John Dillenberger, ed., *John Calvin: Selections from his writings* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company), 274.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Dillenberger, 415.

Faith is not what some people think it is. Their human dream is a delusion. Because they observe that faith is not followed by good works or a better life, they fall into error, even though they speak and hear much about faith. "Faith is not enough," they say, "You must do good works, you must be pious to be saved." They think that, when you hear the gospel, you start working, creating by your own strength a thankful heart which says, "I believe." That is what they think true faith is. But, because this is a human idea, a dream, the heart never learns anything from it, so it does nothing and reform doesn't come from this faith, either.

Instead, faith is God's work in us that changes us and gives new birth from God. (Jn 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, and this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever. He stumbles around and looks for faith and good works, even though he does not know what faith or good works are. Yet he gossips and chatters about faith and good works with many words.

Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire! Therefore, watch out for your own false ideas and guard against good-for-nothing gossips, who think they're smart enough to define faith and works, but really are the greatest of fools. Ask God to work faith in you, or you will remain forever without faith, no matter what you wish, say or can do.¹⁶

Luther's definition of faith moves us further beyond intellectual assent and contextualizes faith in the results of said faith. For Luther, "faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone

¹⁶Martin Luther's *Definition of Faith*, translated by Rev. Robert E. Smith, from Johann K. Irmischer, ed. Vol. 63.

asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing.”¹⁷ Luther further suggests, “Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever.”¹⁸

This is also the central to the message of John Wesley according to Michael Pasquarello. Wesley believed that a true and living faith was not only “an act of understanding but also a disposition of the heart, a sure trust and confidence toward the work of God in Christ.” In his homily, of the Christian Faith he asserted that living faith should be active and working. Indeed, it is in the Book of Homilies that one discovers as John Wall declared a clarion call for Christian action nourished by faith that works through love and leads to eternal life.¹⁹

It is important to understand that for Wesley, faith was understood in relationship to justification, repentance, and sanctification. Relationally, it was in the area of faith and sanctification that Wesley definitively articulated a theology of sanctifying faith, whereby “such a love of God and others...produces all inward and outward holiness.”²⁰ This articulation was tantamount to Wesley’s theological foundation as posited by Robert Monk, who astutely roots Wesley in the larger tradition of the puritan ethos. It was this puritan ethos that insisted, “By its very nature, faith must produce works.”²¹ Quoting Wesley’s words from his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* he further advances

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Michael Pasquarello, *John Wesley: A Preaching Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 48-50.

²⁰Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 174.

²¹Robert C. Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1966), 102.

the argument that “works do not give life to faith, but faith begets works, and then is perfected by them.”²²

Evidence of this Puritan Ethos is found in a sermon from 1746, entitled *Way to the Kingdom* that is most representative of his thoughts about the necessity of a living faith, namely a faith, which manifested itself in works. In that sermon he maintained:

The nature of religion is so far from consisting...in forms of worship, or rites and ceremonies, that it does not properly consist in any outward actions, or what kind so ever. It is true, a man cannot have any religion who is guilty of vicious, immoral actions; or who does to others what he would not they should do unto him, if he were in the same circumstances. And it is also true, that he can have no real religion who ‘knows to do good, and doeth it not.’ Yet may a man both abstain from outward evil, and do good, and still have no religion. Yea, two persons may do the same outward word; suppose feeding the hungry, or clothing the naked; and, in the meantime, one of these may be truly religious, and the other have no religion at all; for the one may act from the love of God, and the other from the love of praise. So manifest it is, that although true religion naturally leads to every good word and word, yet the real nature thereof lies deeper still even in ‘the hidden man of the heart.’²³

Wesley later in that same sermon surmised what would come to represent his doctrine of faith. Not surprisingly it was rooted in the scriptures. Specifically, Mark 12:30, where Jesus seeks to respond to the question, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” This inquiry prompted Jesus to reply, “hear O Israel: ‘the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ Jesus then pushed the envelope further by remarking and “the second is this: you shall love your neighbor as

²²Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 862-863.

²³Edward H. Sugden, ed. *John Wesley's Fifty Three Sermons* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983), 105.

yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." In reflecting on this text,

Wesley made the following assertion:

Thou shalt love---thou shalt embrace with the most tender good-will, the most earnest and cordial affection, the most inflamed desires of preventing or removing all evil, and of procuring for him every possible good. Thy Neighbour---that is, not only thy friend, thy kinsman, or thy acquaintance; not only the virtuous, the friendly, him that loves thee, that prevents or returns thy kindness; but every child of man, every human creature, every soul which God hath made; not excepting him whom thou never hast seen in the flesh, whom thou knowest not, either by face or name, not excepting him whom thou knowest to be evil and unthankful, him that still spitefully uses and persecutes thee: him thou shalt love as thyself; with the same invariable thirst after his happiness in every kind; the same unwearied care to screen him from whatever might grieve or hurt either his soul or body.²⁴

It is important to note that Wesley "expressed the purpose of Christian life in terms of its obligation and its necessity for salvation." He further believed that "a Christian life of love and good works was a secondary, 'remote' condition of salvation; nevertheless it was a necessity and as such becomes a means of sustaining salvation."²⁵ More specifically, the means to sustaining salvation were found in what the Puritans and Wesley deemed as Holiness or Godliness. According to Monk, Wesley was greatly influenced in his theological formulation by Joseph Alleine. It was Alleine, in the mind of Monk, who made it clear that "inward and outward aspects of the Christian life, distinguished but not separated, assume the priority of inward holiness. Outward acts of good must be grounded in inward love, charity, and compassion. Together, inward and outward holiness constituted the foci of the Puritan treatment of Christian life."²⁶

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Monk, 126.

²⁶Monk, 128.

From this puritan influence and formulation, Wesley constructed what this writer calls a theology of Christian perfection, in which “holiness has become a reality.”²⁷ In other words, Christian perfection constituted an inward as well as an outward holiness. It was a salvation received through justification by faith but perfected through the process of sanctification, which reflected both what Richard Sibbes calls the “inward bent of the soul” as well as what Wesley understood as the outward manifestation of holiness.²⁸ In the Wesleyan construction it came to be designated as works of piety and works of mercy. These two designations became the evidence of Christian perfection and became tantamount to Wesley’s teaching on faith. Wesley believed that genuine inward holiness must show itself in outward holiness. Works of piety were worthless without works of mercy. Faith without works of love in Wesley’s formulation was the “grand pest of Christianity.”²⁹ By works of mercy, Wesley referred to works “whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavoring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succor the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death.”³⁰

²⁷Ibid., 129.

²⁸Richard Sibbes, *Fountain Opened*, in *Practical Works of Richard Sibbes*, 5:460.

²⁹Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 57.

³⁰Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley* (London, UK: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 2:166.

This emphasis on Christian perfection, namely as inward conversion and outward expression is further evidenced by his 1765 sermon entitled, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, in which he declares:

At the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment sanctification begins. In that instant, we are 'born again', 'born from above', 'born of the spirit.' There is a real as well as a relative change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel the 'love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us', producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God;³¹

In a sermonic proclamation in 1785, *On Working out our Own Salvation*. In that sermon, he declared that in working out our own salvation, one must accept the notion that:

Salvation is carried on by 'convincing grace', usually in scripture termed 'repentance', which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and a farther deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards, we experience the proper Christian Salvation, whereby 'through grace' we are 'saved by faith', consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favor of God: by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment...till in another instant the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man.³²

Clearly Wesley understood salvation, justification and sanctification as a progressive work, particularly, the process of sanctification. According to John Tyson, "the Wesleyan approach to sanctification viewed Christian works, subsequent to

³¹ Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Hetzenrater, Ed. *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 373.

³² Outler, 488-489.

justification, and being a necessary ‘means of grace’ for our spiritual growth.”³³

Therefore according to Tyson, Wesley “sought to locate his followers in that middle ground between Protestants who stressed justification by faith but knew nothing about sanctification, and Roman Catholics who stressed sanctification but knew nothing about justification by faith.”³⁴

William Abraham who surmises that Wesley was “totally opposed to any vision of justification that will open a door to the denial or neglect of the moral law” provides a summation of this middle ground.³⁵ Abraham reminds us of the following truth regarding Wesley’s theology:

Wesley is seeking to build in the indispensability of ‘works,’ that is, of repentance, of religious practice, of acts of mercy, of love to God and neighbor, and so on. If believers drop the ball at this point, then they will cease to be justified, and they will regress in their spiritual journey³⁶

Clearly, for Wesley any discussion of faith was linked to works and constituted what Abraham described as a “Doctrine of final justification by works.” This final justification by works while not shared by the writer does remind one of the imperatives of wedding faith with works as evidence of justification and as expression of an ongoing process of sanctification. This process of sanctification was central to the theology of Wesley who attempted to create a practical model whereby faith could be formed. It was through the Methodist movement, according to Sondra Matthaei, that an “organizational

³³John R. Tyson, *Wesleyans and Reformation Sunday*. www.houghton.edu/milieu/fall06 (Accessed May 2011).

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵William Abraham, *Wesley: for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 77.

³⁶*Ibid.*

structure that provided instruction about God's grace and the Way of Salvation, as well as nurture in the Christian life through acts of piety (personal holiness), and opportunity to practice holy living through acts of mercy (social holiness).³⁷ She further discloses, "each member of a Methodist society received instruction in the faith and nurture for holy living in a system whose purpose was behavioral change, spiritual growth, personal interaction, and community transformation."³⁸ This structure consisted of the society, class meetings, the band structure, the select society, and the penitents.³⁹ Each intended to promote individual change and communal transformation. Wesley, like those before him was concerned with the inward conversion and outward expression of faith.

Baptist also expressed this concern as early as the 17th century. They too began to wrestle with what would for them constitute a living faith or a faith that synthesized the inward conversion and the outward expression. Specifically, they were concerned with what would constitute the Baptist doctrine of faith, theologically and practically. As early as 1609, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys compiled a short statement of faith. Historians attribute Helwys with writing the first Declaration of Faith proper in 1611. Nevertheless, these early writings constituted the first efforts of a group of Baptist to articulate a doctrine of faith. It was in these early documents that Smyth and Helwys determined:

Faith is knowledge in the mind of the doctrine of the law and gospel contained in the prophetic and apostolic scriptures of the Old and New Testament, accompanying repentance; with an assurance that God, through Christ, will perform the condition of our unfeigned repentance, and amendment of life.⁴⁰

³⁷Matthaei, *Making Disciples*, 131.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 131.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 132-136.

⁴⁰Sam Hughey, "*Short Confessions of Faith in XX Articles by John Smyth*," www.reformedreader.org/ccf/scof1612 (accessed April 2011).

They further asserted, “all penitent and faithful Christians are brethren in communion of the outward church, wheresoever they live, by what name so ever they are known.”⁴¹ Again, the impression given is that faith is more than confessional or creedal. This suggests that those who identified themselves as faithful Christians have a relational responsibility to both God and others. According to Walter Shurden in his book *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*, it was Smyth and the group of Separatist he joined in Gainsborough and their “quest for truth” that led to the conviction that the Bible was the final authority. Shurden quoting Payne asserts:

For Baptists, the Bible is and always has been the final authority. It is the final authority in moral responsibility, in theological beliefs, and in human relationships. The Bible is final, but human understanding of the Bible is never final or complete or finished.⁴²

These early Baptist “did not arrive at the truth in every area of life and then determine to pass it on to succeeding generations. What they arrived at was an attitude of openness to the ongoing study of the Bible under the guidance of the Living Lord of the Church.”⁴³ The Southern Baptist in their own revised “Statement of the Baptist Faith and Message of 1963” contributed to this ongoing search for truth, particularly as it relates to the profession and practice of faith. In that revised confession they argue “Baptists are a people who profess a living faith.” It is a faith rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ. It is a faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures and a faith that must be “continually interpreted and

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Walter Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Hellwys, 1995), 13.

⁴³Ibid.

related to each new generation.”⁴⁴ This reveals the import and impact of faith in the history of the church and within the life of the community of faith. This understanding of faith will be further explored biblically and theologically.

Biblical Foundation

The biblical concept of faith and faith formation serves as the foundation for this ministry project. The overall biblical foundation for this project is rooted in the biblical paradigm as witnessed in the life of Abram/Abraham. This paradigm provides evidence of the possibility of a maturing of faith through a process of intentional faith formation. Scripturally, Genesis 12:1-3 and James 2: 14-26 will serve as the biblical foundation for this ministry project.

Genesis: An Overview

The writer believes that the editors of the Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary offer a sufficient introductory background to the book of Genesis. They readily admit that not much is known by way of its origin or even authorship. However, they do offer insight because they distinguish for the reader two primary types of background material. They identify these types as the “historical background in which the book was written and the historical background of the context of the events recorded in the book.”⁴⁵ More specifically, they suggest that the book of Genesis records two primary types of events.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Kenneth Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary: Volume 1: Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 1.

(1) Those that happened on a global or even cosmic scale, i.e. the creation, the flood, the building of the tower in Babel and (2) those that happened in a relatively isolated way, namely Noah's drunkenness, Abraham's vision and testing, Moses' calling to name a few.⁴⁶

According to Barker and Kohlenberger the purpose of the book of Genesis is linked to that of the purpose of the Pentateuch.⁴⁷ They argue in fact, that:

The final shaping of the canonical Pentateuch involved the sorting and placement of material consisting of at least four distinct literary types: Narrative, poetry, law and genealogy. The genealogical texts play an important role in the early sections of the Pentateuch, especially in the book of Genesis, but do not lead to fruitful conclusions about the shape or structure of the Pentateuch as a whole.⁴⁸

This writer disagrees with that assessment because he feels that in the story of Abram/Abraham we are able to draw some fruitful conclusions regarding the life of faith as revealed in the narratives of Abraham. This is evidenced in their later assertion that a "literary seam in the Pentateuch can be expressed by the term *narrative typology*."⁴⁹ Abram/Abraham is an example of this narrative typology because as they admit "what the author wants to show is that the events of the past are pointers to those in the future."⁵⁰ However, as indicated before in this document Abram/Abraham is a paradigmatic example of faith. This is important because as Dr. Terry Thomas asserts:

One of the things that I think is expected of people of our profession from the people we serve is the ability or capacity to

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Barker and Kohlenberger, 1-2.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

find Biblical paradigms that set forth a model, a truth, or an understanding for a certain capacity, how to carry out a certain task and to discover the meaning for certain things. Richard McBrien in his book *The Church* wrote, ‘a model rises to the status of a paradigm when it has proved successful in solving a great variety of problems and is expected to be an appropriate toll for unraveling anomalies as yet unsolved. It becomes a kind of umbrella model under which all other models are clustered and integrated.’⁵¹

This writer believes that Abram/Abraham meets Thomas’ paradigm standard in that he provides an understanding, namely biblical for how to live a life of faith.

Abram/Abraham

Leon Kass described Abram/Abraham as a “childless, rootless, homelandless, perhaps godless, devoted firstborn son of an old wanderer and radical, a man who has grown out of, but who may have outgrown, the Babylonian ways and gods.”⁵² Despite this characterization, this writer agrees with R.K. Harrison who identifies Abraham as of “profound religious significance because he was the historic ancestor of the twelve tribes.”⁵³ He is also of “profound religious significance” because as Harrison further concedes despite the fact that Abram/Abraham came from a polytheistic background characterized by idolatry and idol worship, he was “reared in the faith of the one true God by his father Terah.”⁵⁴ This is significant because when he received the call to depart, “he

⁵¹Terry Thomas, “*Biblical Paradigms for Exploring the Task of Leadership*” (Lecture, United Theological Seminary, Dayton , OH, January 2010).

⁵²Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 255.

⁵³*Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Abraham,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1996), 6.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

recognized that he had been chosen to implement a specific part of God's plan for human destiny."⁵⁵ According to Harrison, he was able to assume this undertaking because:

He was not to fulfill it alone, because the Lord undertook to go with him. He was required to be consistently obedient to God's will, however difficult that might be, and to trust without question the guidance he would receive against the background of the covenant framework. It should be noted that Abraham was not asked to be obedient as a condition of the covenant. Rather, his response in faith was based upon what he already knew about the God of his ancestors, and was thus a matter of free choice. The importance of strict obedience to the Lord's injunctions assumes early prominence in Old Testament theology.⁵⁶

Therefore, Abram/Abraham was chosen because of his willingness to trust God thereby making him a primary example of the biblical concept of faith."⁵⁷ In reflecting on the faith of Abram/Abraham, Harrison refers to four specific occurrences or "occasions" that are illustrative of what he calls, "the continuing faith of Abraham. The first instance was the immediate response to God's call to leave his family and friends and journey to a land that God would show him. The second such instance of continuing faith according to Harrison was the "completion of the first, consisting of Abraham's parting company with his nephew Lot" in the thirteenth chapter of Genesis.⁵⁸ The third instance is when "God promised Abraham a son who would be named Isaac in Genesis 17:16. The fourth and for Harrison the "most serious test...came when God ordered him to offer up in sacrifice the very one through whom the covenant was to be perpetuated."⁵⁹ While Kass

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

acknowledges like Harrison that Abram was obedient to the call of God. This writer finds it interesting how Kass interprets Abrams willingness to obey the command to go.

Kass contextualizes Abrams/Abrahams obedience in a more selfish, self-centered modality of personal pride and human ambition. In fact, he argues:

I therefore incline to the view that Abram goes not because he is already a God-fearing and obedient man of faith who knows that the voice is the voice of God almighty. He goes because in his heart, he is an ambitious man with a desire for greatness who wants the promise, and he goes because, in his mind, he has some reason to believe that the voice that called him just might belong to a power great enough to deliver. For what kind of being is it that speaks but is not seen and—more wondrous and more to the point—can see into my invisible soul, to know precisely what it is that I, Abram most crave?⁶⁰

However, Kass despite this assertion allows for the concession of faith being primary by intimating that:

Though I am partial to this interpretation, on both political and psychological grounds, we must remember that the text is absolutely silent regarding Abram's motives for answering God's call. For now, the most important fact is that he indeed answers it immediately, unhesitatingly, and to the letter.⁶¹

This writer agrees that the motives of Abram/Abraham cannot be determined from the biblical narrative. Ultimately, what is revealed through the narrative of Abram/Abraham is a willingness to answer the call and command of God. This seems to be the dominant theme revealed in this Old Testament account. Likewise, the editors of the *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* posit "Abraham's faith in God is the dominant theme from the OT tradition to the latest NT reference."⁶²

⁶⁰Kass, 257.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²*The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Abraham", 20.

In the OT tradition this is evidence of the Yahwistic writer or the “J” source writer’s influence. The Yahwistic writer source is the “earliest written narrative of Abram/Abraham” as well as its fullest.⁶³ According to the writings of the Yahwistic writer “two themes run through his story of Abraham: God’s promise of land and descendants, and the patriarch’s struggle for sure faith that the divine promise will be fulfilled.”⁶⁴ Properly understood, this is in response to what the Yahwistic writer deemed the failing of humankind. As Barry Bandstra reveals:

The Tower of Babel story was the last Yahwistic episode of the Primeval Story. The Yahwistic source had traced the course of humankind’s sinning against God. In addition, it related the response of God; confrontation and expulsion from Eden, the flood, scattering humankind, all the nations falling under the curse of God. The Yahwistic writer’s portrayal of human activity suggests that all human efforts are nothing if they are an attempt to grasp rather than to receive greatness. The result of human history to that point was that humankind had distanced itself from God. Yet, it was in dire need of help, which could only come from God.⁶⁵

This is the struggle of humanity, whether to rely on God or self. This insistence on self-reliance often leads humanity to struggle with their faith. This is no different in the Abrahamic faith narrative as outlined in Genesis 11:27-25:11. In this narrative, we encounter Abram/Abraham from the Yahwistic perspective as struggling with his faith. However, several instances in the Abraham story reveal Abraham’s faithfulness. Again, this perspective is seen most powerfully in Genesis 15:1-6 and Genesis 22:1-19. In the Genesis 15 narrative account Abraham is told by God that the “this man will not be your

⁶³*The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Abraham”, 16.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵Barry Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), 78-79.

heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.”⁶⁶ The passage suggests in verse 6, “then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”⁶⁷ This passage reveals that Abram received God’s promise as an endorsement of Eliezer. However, God reveals to him that this was not the heir. Notwithstanding, in the sixteenth chapter Sarai recognizing that she was barren, offered to Abram her handmaid Hagar. Hagar would bear Abram Ishmael. This inability to wait upon God for the fulfillment of the promise is tantamount to what the Yahwistic would identify as Abraham struggling with his faith. Chapter 15 reveals an inconsistency in his faith profession and practice. By doing so it reveals the human tendency to rely on our own efforts.

This inconsistency of profession and practice is seemingly resolved in Chapter 22. It is in Chapter 22, where we encounter an Abraham that embodies a faith that is consistent with his actions. In Chapter 22 we are introduced to the story of Abrahams offering of Isaac. This story is significant because it represents the consistency of articulation and action. It speaks to a congruent faith that synthesizes both profession and practice. In this narrative, we find Abrahams willingness to sacrifice the promised child to the One that made the initial promise. This willingness to trust God makes Abraham a suitable biblical paradigm. Theologically, the writer finds in the above four narratives the balanced faith that is advocated by the ministry project. A balance demonstrated by active response to the promises of God. Ultimately, this writer agrees with Kass’ declaration

⁶⁶Gn 15:4, (NKJV).

⁶⁷Ibid.

that relative to Abram/Abraham the narrative is about “man’s relation to God.”⁶⁸ It is through the varying “set of adventures” that we are confronted with “issues of obedience, trust, and faith.”⁶⁹

Old Testament

Genesis 12:1-3

“The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.”⁷⁰

The writer believes this is an appropriate Old Testament text to support his contention that faith requires corresponding action. This is illustrated powerfully in the faith narrative of Abram, particularly in the verses under consideration. The faith narrative of Abraham is so significant that it is lifted as significant throughout the New Testament epistles as the demonstration of embodied faith. For instance, the writer of Hebrews and the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans lift up some segment of the Abrahamic faith narrative as exemplary and worthy of emulation. This writer agrees with

⁶⁸Kass, 264.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Genesis 12:4-5, (NIV).

Harrison, who argues, “If God’s plan for human salvation was to be implemented, the Lord had to be able to trust those whom he called and empowered for this task. Only after testing under difficult conditions did the relative trustworthiness of the servant become apparent.”⁷¹ Harrison understands that Abrahams “unwavering faith accomplished the fulfillment of the covenant promises in terms of a great nation that would honor him through the centuries as ‘their father.’”⁷² Furthermore, he correctly understands that for the New Testament reader “this privilege, however, was not to be restricted to the Jews, but was also shared by adherents to the world religions of Christianity and Islam.”⁷³ It is important to note, that what makes Abraham the father of faith is not the command or promise of God, rather it was Abraham’s actions in response to God’s commands. It is the realization that Abraham as depicted through these faith narratives was one that God could trust. Robert Alter in the *Art of Biblical Narrative* validates this view. Alter writes about what characterizes reliable third-person narrations.”⁷⁴ He writes there is a “scale of means, in ascending order of explicitness and certainty, for conveying vital information about the motives, the attitudes, the moral nature of characters.”⁷⁵ This scale of means provides the means by which a biblical character can be “revealed through the report of actions; through appearance, gestures, posture, costume; through one character’s comments on another; through direct speech by the character; through inward speech, either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator

⁷¹*Baker Theological Dictionary*, 7.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981), 146.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanations.”⁷⁶ This reporting of actions in Altar’s schema constitutes the higher end of the scale of reliability. In other words, the actions of a character are received as more reliable than those on the other end of the spectrum such as direct or indirect speech. However, Altar understands that the more of these items are germane to the character narration the more reliable the characterization. The story of Abram is one such characterization. The story of Abram begins in earnest in the eleventh Chapter of the book of beginnings. It is important to note as Fretheim noted that:

The book of Genesis does not present the reader with historical narrative, at least in any modern sense. Its primary concerns are theological and kerygmatic. Those responsible for the materials we now have it were persons of faith concerned to speak or reflect on a word of God to other persons of faith. The voice of a living community of faith resounds through these texts. Rooted in history in this way, Genesis is not socially or historically disinterested; it was written—at each stage of transmission—with the problems and possibilities of a particular audience in view.⁷⁷

This suggests to the writer that those who constructed this moving narrative were concerned with the faith of a community who in their present are struggling with their faith and the writers are concerned with narrating a story that addresses theologically what they are facing. Despite Frethiem’s assertion that the concern of the writers was not historical but theological and kerygmatic, the writers still employ the conventions of a historical narrative. Therefore, this narrative of Abram begins with his genealogy. This is an important insight based on Freithem construction of the book of Genesis. Like Barker

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Friethem, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, 324-325.

and Kohlenberger he identifies the two primary literary forms of narratives and genealogies.⁷⁸

This writer is concerned with the narrative portion of Genesis, specifically those portions of the Genesis narrative that this writer identifies as faith narratives. They begin in earnest in the eleventh chapter of Genesis beginning with the genealogical record of Abraham. We are told through the biblical record that Abram whose name meant Terah begot “My father is exalted” in the 27th verse and then in the 29th verse we are told that Abram took a wife named Sarai. This is followed by the information in verse 30 that Sarai was barren. This is an important insight and crucial to the Abrahamic faith narrative because it provides the backdrop for the developing story of Abram. The barrenness of Sarai begins the faith narrative proper. In fact, this writer agrees with R.K. Harrison who sees this as the first instance of what he calls the continuing faith of Abraham, which was illustrated and initiated by “God’s command to leave both family and homeland and migrate to a strange country. The severing of emotional ties was bound to be costly, yet Abraham went forward without once questioning God’s power to fulfill his promises.”⁷⁹

The Setting Of The Passage

The Abram/Abraham story begins in chapter eleven. The Word Commentary contextualizes the story of Abraham in Genesis as “essentially an itinerary expanded with

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Walter A. Elwell, ed. *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, 6.

genealogical details, divine promises and notes about Abram's responses."⁸⁰ Fretheim makes the following observations:

God's speaking, in particular God's articulation of a command accompanied by promises, constitutes the generative event of the story of Abraham. Everything in Abraham's story follows from God's word to him in 12:1-3. Without those divine words, there would be no preserved story of Abraham, or at least no story, as we know it. At the same time, Abraham's trusting response to God's word also decisively shapes the story that follows.⁸¹

Specifically, the shape of Genesis 12:1-3 reflect the record of God's divine promises and Abram's responsiveness to the covenantal promises of God. Abram/Abraham's faith is in response to God's faithfulness.

The Text

The twelfth chapter of Genesis begins with God speaking to Abram, the narrative declares that "The Lord had said to Abram, 'leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'"⁸² According to the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, the Book of Genesis written by Terence Fretheim, this command/promise structure provides the key for the rest of Genesis.

This command/promise structure especially the response of Abram also provides an insight into faith, which the author of Hebrews sought to highlight. As Fretheim

⁸⁰*Word Commentary*, GN 11:27-12:9.

⁸¹Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith*, 30.

⁸²GN12:1-9, (NIV).

argues, even though Abram will never see the promised “future, his response will shape it.”⁸³ This command/promise begins in vs. 1 with an imperative command from God for Abram to Leave, that word for leave in the Hebrew is ‘azah and means to leave, forsake, or abandon.⁸⁴ It literally means to depart from something.⁸⁵ Abram is commanded to literally forsake or abandon his family and this abandonment is tantamount to a call to faith. This is instructive because it suggests that in our own faith walk, we may be required to leave, forsake, or even abandon what was normative for us. However, what is also instructive in this passage is what Fretheim calls the “increasing level of intimacy.”⁸⁶ He notes the progression of the call. First, he called to leave his country. Secondly, he is called to leave his clan. Thirdly, he is called to leave his home. This progression reflects the totality of the call. One notices in vv. 2 and 3, a series of promises, which reflect a broadening of intimate relationships beyond that which Abram is called to leave.

In verse 2a, there is the promise of becoming a great nation. In verse 2b the promise of personal blessings. This is followed in verse 2c, with a promise of exaltation with the caveat and corollary thought that Abram will be a blessing to others. This is followed by the Divine promise of blessings or cursing predicated upon the response of others toward him and finally in 3b, the understanding that the earth would be blessed through Abram. This seems to imply that Abrams act of faith would be beneficial to not only Abram but would have implications for future generations. Fretheim supports that claim when he writes regarding the series of cohortative verbs:

⁸³Terence E. Fretheim, *New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, 422.

⁸⁴*Vines Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*. (PC Study Bible, 1988-2012).

⁸⁵*Ibid*.

⁸⁶Fretheim, 423.

A series of four cohortative verbs...express emphatically the intention of the speaker, each of which provides gracious divine promises to Abraham, but whose full realization lies beyond his own lifetime.⁸⁷

In *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, Fretheim argues that Abram embodies later Israel. Whether Abram is a type for Israel is debatable, however, it does warrant some consideration. The writer in reflecting on the lives of both Abram and the people of Israel sees the parallels. These faith stories record the struggles of Abraham the individual and Israel the community to trust God despite the promises of God and the faithfulness of God. For Freitheim, the command/promise structure points to the ability of God to bring to pass what He has promised. However it is important to note that the command/promise structure relies on an appropriate response.

Abraham's faithfulness also functions centrally in these stories, a centrality made especially evident in the story of Isaac. Key texts provide the center for this concern. They appear at the beginning and end of the cycle, and in the key covenant section. The shape of the future is determined, not simply by the one who speaks the promise, but by the way the recipient responds to it. Abraham does not act as the passive recipient of a drama shaped solely by the divine will and word. What Abraham does and says has an effect on what happens in the future beyond the promise. Nonetheless, Abraham can neither preserve nor annul the promise, since God will be faithful to promises made.⁸⁸

Therefore, it is Abrams response and by extension our response to the commands and promises of God that are crucial to the manifestations of the promises because, we understand that the God who promised if faithful. Abram reflects his total commitment to God's directive. The text says in verse 4a, "so Abram left as the Lord had told him."

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Fretheim, 419.

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* posits that the idea of faith is expressed in these passages. The writer agrees with this commentary that in responding to the command to leave his country, kith and kin and the relative comforts of home “required an unparalleled act of faith.” This is an unparalleled act because the Bible does not record such a call prior to the call of Abram. It is unparalleled because at the time of the call, Abram was seventy-five. Yet, despite this fact “Abram responded to it in faith.”⁸⁹ It is this willingness to respond, which makes Abram/Abraham a biblical model for faith. While this writer understands that the “call” narrative of Abraham is primarily and principally about the command and promises of God, which laid the foundation for the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant. This writer recognizes that within the “call” there was an expectation of responding to the call in faith. James declared “without faith it is impossible to please God.”⁹⁰ Therefore, faith was and is a necessary component to receiving the blessings and promises of God.

It is Abrams/Abrahams response, which warranted his elevation in the minds of the New Testament writers as a model of faith worthy of emulation. Richard N. Longenecker reveals “the theme of faith of Abraham is employed by three different New Testament writers in three quite different ways.”⁹¹ Longenecker is concerned with the “circumstantial” nature behind the theme of the faith of Abraham. By circumstantial he is speaking to the “specific thrust and form of the Christian message and ministry.”⁹²

⁸⁹*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, CD-ROM (PC Study Bible, 1988-2012).

⁹⁰Heb 11:6, (NIV).

⁹¹Richard Longenecker. *The “Faith of Abraham” theme in Paul, James and Hebrews: A Study in the Circumstantial Nature of the New Testament Teaching*, 203.

⁹²*Ibid.*

Longenecker situates the theme of faith in the Old Testament within the covenant between God and Abraham. He then situates the New Testament theme as the foundation of righteousness. This is seen in Paul's writing to the church in Rome, where in the fourth chapter, Abrahams was justified by faith.⁹³ Likewise, in Galatians chapter three verses six through eighteen, Paul offers that Abraham was "justified by faith and it was counted as righteousness to him."⁹⁴ In Hebrews the eleventh chapter, the writer summates the life of Abraham into a faith narrative from "call" to the offering of Isaac. This writer embraces the value of studying and understanding the various circumstances under which this "theme of Abraham's faith" is used. This understanding provides a model of faith maturity as well as a model for faith, which can and should be embraced by the believer.

New Testament

This writer believes this is the overall theme of the New Testament canonical writers. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that New Testament writers corresponded with various communities and churches to address issues, exhort, and encourage believers. Furthermore, if a writer used an Old Testament example it was intended to be understood within its original context with the understanding that the Old Testament reference would provide clues to the meaning of the New Testament passage. Therefore, the writers of the New Testament were intentional in their utilization of Abraham as a model of what faith in God looked like as well as what would be the results of said faith. This writer surmises from the life of Abraham that the circumstances might change but

⁹³Ro 4:1-25, (ESV).

⁹⁴Gal 3:6-18, (ESV).

the response should always be the same. This is seen most specifically, in the version of Abraham's testing recorded in the second chapter of James.

Ben Witherington, professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary in his text *New Testament History* submits that the function of the book of James as a "document is to reinforce the socializing process of new Jewish Christians, who due to pressure or persecution are now wavering in their faith."⁹⁵ He further proffers that the "author is concerned to help those converts reject a corrupted version of the Pauline message, as James 2:14-26 shows."⁹⁶ In fact, Witherington suggests:

James' concern was with orthodoxy, in terms of honoring the one true God, and also with orthopraxy, with perhaps a stronger emphasis on the latter. Basically, the letter of James is about how Jewish Christians must live; very little is said about what they must believe...the letter gives a strong sense of the practical nature of James's teaching.⁹⁷

This insight is important given the number of exhortations from James throughout his book. However, according to Witherington this exhortation to right living was not unusual or exclusive to James. In fact, he contextualizes James' writings within the larger Jewish Christian milieu when he writes:

Like most early Jews, James was wrapped up in the matter of how to honor God in day to day living. Persevering in the faith and patience in suffering, being a good listener, bridling the tongue, avoiding favoritism, demanding responsibility of those who have more resources, praying for and laying hands on the sick---these are staples of James's discourse.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Ben Witherington, *New Testament History: A Narrative Account* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 298.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 299.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

James was concerned with how Jewish Christians lived their lives in relationship to God and the world around them. This also suggests that this was a primary concern of the early church and its leadership. Therefore, the passage of James 2:14-26 was selected because it best spoke, in the estimation of the writer, to the communal and participatory nature of a dynamic and vibrant faith. It was also chosen because through this passage James is challenging the community of faith beyond the status quo. He writes in that second chapter:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.⁹⁹

In order for a believer, and in this context leadership of a believing community, to shift their thinking about what faith constitutes, it is necessary to provide a solid biblical foundation. James 2:14-26 provides such a biblical foundation.

⁹⁹Jas 2:14-26, (NIV).

Setting Of The Passage

It is believed that James wrote this letter. While many scholars differ as to the actual identity of this James, it has been the prominent view since about the third century that this James was the brother of Jesus. In fact according to Kenneth Barker and John Kohlenberger of the Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, this view was shared by Origen, Eusebius and Jerome.¹⁰⁰ In addition they point to the characteristics of James as portrayed in Acts 21:11-25 and Galatians 2:12 as well as the description of James the Just by Hegesippus as further evidence. This claim is based on what they describe as the letters “heavy emphasis on genuine religious practice and ethical conduct. They further point to the similarity of the vocabulary used in the letter as well as that recorded in Acts 15:13-29.”¹⁰¹

Not surprisingly, just as there are debates and lingering questions as to identity there are also questions related to the date of composition of this letter. There are some scholars who would suggest that because of the Jewish orientation of the letter that it was composed between A.D. 45 and 50. While still others suggest that it was written closer to the end of James’ life, circa A.D. 62. The authors suggested the former for several reasons:

- 1) The Jewish orientation of the letter fits the earlier period more naturally than the later. That the author does not refer to Gentiles or related subjects may well point to the time in the history of the early church when Gentiles were only beginning to be reached with the Gospel.

¹⁰⁰Zondervan *NIV Bible Commentary*, 1016.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*

- 2) The absence of any reference to the controversy concerning the Judaizers and their insistence on Gentile circumcision is be explained by the earlier date.
- 3) The close affinity of the teaching of James to that of the OT and Christ suggests a time before other NT letters were written.
- 4) The evidence of a simple church order favors the early date. The leaders are teachers (3:1) and elders (5:11).
- 5) Finally, the use of the Greek term *synagogue* to describe the church assembly or meeting place (2:2) points to the early period when Christianity was largely confined to Jewish circles.¹⁰²

That the audience was Jewish is revealed in the opening of this letter, where James definitively shares that he is writing to the “twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, we also know that his intended recipients are Christian. This is especially made clear in James 2 verse 1 where James declares, “My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory”¹⁰⁴ These insights taken together clearly reveals that his audience, are primarily Jewish Christians who have been scattered and are living a diaspora existence because of persecution in Jerusalem. While there is no specificity regarding their location, we can be certain of what James’ purpose was for writing. James is writing to encourage and exhort in the faith and about the necessity for faith. He is writing to instruct and inspire. His style is direct and devoid of the philosophical language of the other epistles.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Jas 1:1, (ESV).

¹⁰⁴Jas 2:1, (ESV).

Barker and Kohlenberger contextualized James writings initially by marking its similarity to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Secondly, they contextualize his writing by marking, what they call the "literary relationship" between James and Old Testament wisdom writings such as proverbs.¹⁰⁵

Luke Timothy Johnson in the *New Interpreter's Bible* in his introductory comments regarding James also contextualized the writing of James as "wisdom writing." In fact, scholars suggest that of the 108 verses contained in James' letter 59 are moral imperatives. In other words, James "as a kind of wisdom...naturally bears a certain resemblance to the wide range of wisdom writings that were produced in the ancient Near East." Johnson shares that viewpoint but he then points out four ways in which James, in his estimation, "stand out among all ancient moral literature." He offered four significant ways:

- 1) James's concern with morals rather than manners
- 2) James addresses an intentional community rather than a household
- 3) James is egalitarian rather than hierarchical
- 4) James is communitarian rather than individualistic

James is concerned with the ways in which the community professes and practices its faith. James Adamson writes, "the motif, or theme, of the Epistle of James is 'faith at work.'"¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, according to Adamson, this "theme, 'faith realized in conduct'

¹⁰⁵Barker and Kohlenberger, 1017.

¹⁰⁶James Adamson, *James: The Man and his Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 267.

(action, deed, or whatever we care to call the practical outworking of faith), is the key to the Epistle.”¹⁰⁷

His point is to present a moral and communal modality, which would foster and facilitate an egalitarian and communitarian form of faith. This is why he seeks to root his discussion on faith in the model set by Jesus. Therefore, the content of James 2:14-26 cannot be properly understood without the context that came before it in verses 1-13.

According to Patrick Hartin in the *Sacra Pagina* a “careful examination of this pericope shows a connection to and a continuation of the line of thought presented in the previous passage” of vv. 1-13. According to Hartin, James is juxtaposing the faith of Jesus and the faith of the faith community. Namely, he is stressing the fact that “Jesus’ faith precluded any discrimination against others. The focus rested on the faith of Jesus and the challenge was to put that faith into action through the practice of the command of love.”¹⁰⁸ He correctly points out that the faith of Jesus Christ reflected in verse 1 demanded that one show no partiality and demonstrates love.¹⁰⁹

The point James is attempting to make and the message he is conveying is that faith should express itself in tangible ways. If it is a dynamic and vibrant faith then it will manifest itself in love and will not show partiality toward others based on their particularity of gender, race, orientation, socio-economic status, or religious affiliations. The faith that James is alluding to is a faith that emulates the faith practice of Jesus. The implication is clear that if we are followers of him then we should model him and be a

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Patrick Hartin, *Sacra Pagina* V, 14, 156.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

reflection of him in the world. Apparently, this was not the faith that was being demonstrated in the community to which James is corresponding. Faith is James's ultimate concern for this dispersed community. In fact, McCartney in reflecting on this portion of scripture offers:

The latter half of James 2 comprises the most extended development of a single subject in the letter. It is also the best known part of the letter because at points it appears to directly contradict the teaching of Paul that believers are justified by faith apart from works...the contradiction is superficial and results from Paul and James having different concerns, different backgrounds, and different audiences with different problems. But for all these differences, the concern for 'works' here is part of James's overall concern for faith. Faith is no less important to James than it is to Paul, and it is precisely because faith is so important to James that he harshly condemns a false variety of it.¹¹⁰

Longenecker in commenting on the perceived contradictions between Paul and James asks the question "does James really contradict Paul? Or is it a case of differing circumstantial employments of the same theme?"¹¹¹ Quoting Joachim Jeremias he offers that (1) James uses different language from Paul and (2) his "field of battle is different."¹¹²

This writer agrees with the assessment of both McCartney and Longenecker. He also agrees with McCartney that the unifying theme of James' letter is faith. And that James and Paul are speaking about the same subject from different vantage points and with different agendas. James for his part is concerned with how faith is expressed in the face of testing, trials, and temptations. Thereby, his greatest concern is that faith is

¹¹⁰Dan McCartney, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the NT: James*, 154.

¹¹¹Richard Longenecker, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society: The "Faith of Abraham" Theme.*, 206.

¹¹²Longenecker quoting Joachim Jeremias, 206.

reflected in works or deeds. McCartney, quoting Verseput reminds his reader “James, like the Old Testament Prophets, condemns not faith, but hypocritical faith that fails to produce righteous behavior.”¹¹³ McCartney illustrates this point by pointing to the scriptural clues in the writing of James, for instance he writes:

The preceding material in 2:1-13 condemns the prejudicial treatment of people not just because it is evil, but also because it is radically incongruous with faith in Jesus as Lord (2:1). Likewise because of his concern that faith in Christ be a true faith with integrity, James in 1:6-8 condemns the double-minded person who waffles between God and something else. And in James 3 it is James’s expectation that the confession of God as Lord and Father have integrity that results in his denunciation of any use of the tongue that is incongruous with that confession (3:9-10)¹¹⁴

THE TEXT

The overall meaning of this message from James is “that ‘faith alone’ is not adequate without the deeds of faith.”¹¹⁵ James is encouraging his hearers to embody and outwardly express what they profess. In fact, Johnson asserts that James now “shows how false is a faith that refuses to help those in need.”¹¹⁶ In short, James is questioning the authenticity of such faith claims. This writer does not often agree with the theological conclusion of William Barclay, however, his insight on James is worth consideration. In his Bible Study Commentary, he takes exception with what he identifies as an either/or mindset as it relates to faith and works. In his estimation, as well as the writers that it is

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Luke Timothy Johnson, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, s.v.v. James, 196.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

“necessarily a case of both faith and works.”¹¹⁷ He argues powerfully against such dichotomy by suggesting:

In many ways, Christianity is falsely represented as an either or when it must properly be a ‘both and’. In the well-proportioned life, there must be thought and action. It is tempting and it is common to think that it is able to be either primarily engaged in thought or in action. The thoughtful individual will sit in a study thinking great thoughts; the person who needs to be involved in action...in the world doing great deeds. But that is wrong. The thinker is only a half a person unless the thoughts are turned into deeds, and will scarcely even inspire others to action unless he or she comes down into the battle and shares the arena with them.¹¹⁸

Likewise, the church has falsely represented the teachings of James and Paul as antithetical to the other. This has resulted in an either or dichotomy in the church particularly when addressing issues of faith. However, this writer believes that if the church is to embody the faith of our forefathers in faith it must be reflected as both and. Again, Barclay proves valuable. He asserts, “in any well-balanced life, there must be faith and deeds. It is only through deeds that faith can prove and demonstrate itself, and it is only through faith that deeds will be completed and done.”¹¹⁹

Reading James in that light is informative. First, it provides us with the foundational framework by which to understand his words in the second chapter of his epistle. Second, it proves instructional for those who would live a well-balanced life of faith. Lastly, it provides a hermeneutic of faith, which must be properly understood in its original context. This proper understanding will provide the rubric for re-interpretation within the twenty-first century church.

¹¹⁷William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 88.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

Dan McCartney tells us that “this passage contains many marks of the type of Greek discourse known as diatribe, especially the use of rhetorical irony, hyperbolic examples, colorful metaphors and analogies, and a hypothetical interlocutor.”¹²⁰ A diatribe is defined as a “bitter, sharply abusive denunciation, attack, or criticism. It is a derivative of the Greek meaning to rub away.”¹²¹ James is seeking, in a figurative sense, to rub away the communities misconception related to faith and their practice of faith.

McCartney provides the following subsections to explain the diatribe. They are inactive faith is useless and dead (14-17); two types of false faith: that which separates faith and works and that which confuses faith with intellectual assent to a creed (vv. 18-19); two examples of genuine faith: Abraham and Rahab, concluding with a reiteration of the principle that inactive faith is dead (vv. 20-26).¹²² Barker and Kohlenberger offered another possible division. They offered the following division for the passage: the proposition (vv. 16-17); the argument (vv. 18-25); and the concluding statement (v.26).¹²³

The writer will utilize Barker and Kohlenberger’s broad categories of proposition, argument, and concluding statement to explore this passage in greater depth.

The Proposition

James presents his proposition using two questions. The first being “what good is it if someone claims to have faith but has not deeds?” And the second question, “can a

¹²⁰McCartney, Dan. *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the NT: James*, 154.

¹²¹Dictionary.com, s.v. “Diatribe,” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/diatribe> (accessed April 2011).

¹²²McCartney, 154.

¹²³Barker, Kenneth L. and John R. Kohlenberger, 1026.

faith like this save him?”¹²⁴ The proposition is clear. The implications even clearer that in order for one to embody an authentic faith that one must have deeds consistent with said faith. In response to his own question he wonders if such a faith can save anyone. In fact, according to Barker and Kohlenberger the phrase can such a faith save him? is structured in such a way in the Greek that it expects a negative answer.”¹²⁵

The implication is clear a faith that saves is evidenced by what it does and not merely by what it professes. Accordingly, Dan McCartney suggests the “claim to faith is not the same as faith.”¹²⁶ This writer agrees with that assessment. Barker and Kohlenberger who are that “faith that saves requires faith that proves itself in the deeds it produces further supports this. These deeds do not earn merit before God; rather, genuine faith is a concomitant of regeneration and therefore affects the believer’s behavior.

Faith that does not issue in regenerate actions is superficial and spurious.”¹²⁷ In other words, faith must be realized through corresponding action. According to the editors of The International Critical Commentary, “*Erga* is *Erga* with a minimum of *Pistis* or faith.”¹²⁸ Rick Renner argues that *erga* or works “signified some kind of action, deed, or activity.

Very often it referred to a person’s occupation, to one’s labor, or to the things produced by someone’s effort or life. It described a person’s line of work, his career, his

¹²⁴Ibid., 1027.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Dan McCartney, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the NT: James*, 155.

¹²⁷Barker and Kohlenberger, 1027.

¹²⁸Ropes, *The International Critical Commentary: St. James*, 210.

labor, or his profession. It denoted the results of his hard work.”¹²⁹ Spiros Zodhiates in *The Complete Word Study New Testament* suggests that in “James...*erga* generally denotes acts by which the man proves his genuineness and his faith. Faith is proven by its works.”¹³⁰ This comprehensive understanding of *erga* is seen as James expands his propositional argument.

James powerfully expands the proposition proper by pointing to the care of the needy brothers and sisters in their midst as a basic faith-deed. According to McCartney the works that James has in view are faith deeds, the kind of actions that are endemic to and characteristic of faith as heat is to fire or as breathing is to life.”¹³¹ This proposition proper in vv. 15-17 seeks to expose the absurdity of the claims that were hypothetically raised in this passage.

The verdict ultimately being, what does it profit? The writer agrees with Barker and Kohlenberger the “preposterousness of such a command is no doubt intentional, what good is it? James asks. Its seeming concern for the welfare of the poor person is a worthless façade.”¹³² James’ response to such a preposterous claim was “faith if it does not have works, is dead.”¹³³ By dead, it is ineffectual. The point being “action is the proper fruit of living faith. Because life is dynamic and productive, faith that lives will

¹²⁹ Rick Renner, *Sparkling Gems from the Greek*, 493.

¹³⁰ Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Complete Word Study New Testament: King James Version*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Word Publishing, 1992), 915.

¹³¹ McCartney, 156.

¹³² Barker and Kohlenberger, 1027.

¹³³ Ibid.

surely produce the fruit of good deeds. Therefore, if no deeds are forthcoming, it is proof that the professed faith is dead.

James does not deny that it is faith. He simply indicates that it is not the right kind of faith. It is not a living faith, nor can it save.”¹³⁴ James, as Longenecker reflects “has in mind acts of Christian love that spring from a true faith—acts of love that have the practical effect of feeding, clothing and housing the needy.”¹³⁵

McCartney speaking of what he calls the faith-deed shares this opinion. He shares the following insight:

Thus, the faith-deed of provision for a fellow believer’s hunger or nakedness is a particularly apt example, not only because it emphasizes the necessity of love of neighbor in the church, but also because the needy person receives no benefit from nice words, just as the professing Christian receives no benefit from inactive faith. And there is an echo here of Jesus’s words in Matthew 25: 31-46, where Jesus’ verdict to the Gentiles is based on their response to the nakedness, hunger, and imprisonment of Jesus’s ‘little ones.’¹³⁶

He goes on to say:

So too, that kind of faith (2:17), the kind that is unaccompanied by appropriate deeds (faith ‘by itself’), shows itself to be dead. In other words, its inaction is a mute but powerful testimony to its deadness (dead bodies do nothing), and it shows itself to be a false faith by the way it responds to the needy brother. So James is telling his hearers, ‘if your faith does not benefit others, it will not benefit you either... indeed, such a faith is less than worthless; it is repulsive. James pulls no punches here: this faith devoid of deeds is not just sick or in danger of dying; it is *nekra*, dead, a corpse.’¹³⁷

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Longenecker, 207.

¹³⁶McCartney, 157.

¹³⁷Ibid.

He notes, “religious Jews, for whom contact with a dead body imparted ceremonial pollution, would have regarded such an image as especially repugnant, but dead bodies are repulsive to Gentiles as well.”¹³⁸ Adamson comes to the same conclusion as he asserts that this verse is “a vivid way of stating that without works faith is no faith at all any more than a corpse is a man. Having form, this faith lacks force—‘outwardly inoperative, because inwardly dead.’”¹³⁹ Peter David is commenting on these verses offered the following explanation:

That which will be useless in the final judgment is a faith lacking works. The hypothetical situation introduced by εἰς is described as a person “claiming to have faith.” And a claim it is for whatever the content of the faith in terms of orthodox belief, pious expressions, prayers, etc., it appears only in the person’s verbalizations (and ritual actions) but not in such deeds as would prove the reality of an eschatological hope.¹⁴⁰

The Argument

James next moves from proposition proper into argument supporting his contention that faith without works is dead. In support of this proposition, James develops three arguments; they are according to Barker and Kohlenberger:

- 1) Deeds are necessary to prove that a person has faith.
- 2) Saving faith is not a mere intellectual acceptance of a theological proposition.
- 3) Refers to a deficiency that is intellectual, but in the theological and moral context of the New Testament the term also has a moral and spiritual flavor.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 124.

¹⁴⁰Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 120.

It is to this first propositional argument that this writer is most interested and which provides the biblical foundation for this project. The argument of James, according to Adamson centers on the claim of faith vis a' vis works. He articulates James' argument in the following way:

You claim to have faith and I claim to have works, actions, behavior. I can prove the existence and quality of my faith by my works (actions and behavior), but I defy you to prove (to me or any of the rest of mankind) the existence and/or quality of your faith. For I do not believe that without works (actions and behavior) you can possibly have any genuine faith.¹⁴¹

This writer agrees with Adamson as well as Timothy Cargal who further concedes that for James the issue is not whether 'faith separated from works' can be considered 'proper faith.' For James, the real issue is whether the bifurcation of faith and works is sufficient "since it is of no 'benefit' in making one alive."¹⁴² He later reflects that as James argues with what Cargal identifies as his interlocutor, the core of the argument revolves around the question of whether faith and works can be separated. Cargal posits, "whereas his opponent wishes to separate faith from actions, such that even faith in isolation from works might be of some 'benefit,' James counters in this section (Jas 2:14-19) that 'faith' must lead to action/'works.'" In other words, "faith is inseparable from works because 'works are not an added extra' to faith, but are an essential expression of it."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Adamson, 125.

¹⁴² Timothy B. Cargal, *Restoring the Diaspora* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 121.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 125.

This writer also agrees with McCartney, “true faith responds to need to the extent that it is able.”¹⁴⁴ This is the challenge of faith. An embodiment of a faith that is willing to help those who are most in need. McCartney articulated the following:

Thus, the faith-deed of provision for a fellow believer’s hunger or nakedness is a particularly apt example, not only because it emphasizes the necessity of love of neighbor in the church, but also because the needy person receives no benefit from nice words, just as the professing Christian receives no benefit from inactive faith.¹⁴⁵

The writer further agrees with McCartney’s conclusion that in his assessment of verses eighteen to twenty-five. It is in that “brief paragraph comprising James 2:18-19 James deals with two misconceptions about faith”, or two dimensions of false faith. Again, this writer finds in McCartney’s conclusion an adequate summation of the verses under consideration, specifically, vv. 18-25. In his conclusion, McCartney attacks the supposition that faith is somehow opposed to works, or that there are two different ways of approaching God, some people coming by faith and others coming by works. Second, he repudiates the notion that faith consists solely in believing certain doctrines to be true.¹⁴⁶ Adamson further clarifies the argument by suggesting:

I have works, or I have faith, does not here mean, I have only works, or have only faith, nor I have mainly works or faith. James, like all Christians, believes that Christian works can proceed only from Christian faith and that Christian faith cannot fail to produce Christian works; in the activity of Christian belief there can be no distinguishing bias between faith and works.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴McCartney, 157.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, 125.

In a later work, Adamson expressed the argument in more demonstrative terms by intimating the following regarding faith:

Religious faith, living faith, is belief energized by activity, and life is essentially activity. Faith cooperates with works; that is how faith lives. All this is in perfect agreement with what Paul and James have said, that faith without works is a sham. Only inspired by the Christian love that fulfills is the Christian law genuine.¹⁴⁸

He further asserts that for James faith and works are not mutually exclusive. In fact, he offers the following illustratively, that “faith cooperated with works, and by works, “faith was made perfect, that is, was consummated, or expressed and fulfilled itself. Faith operates in conjunction with works, not otherwise.”¹⁴⁹ The fact that there is no distinguishing bias between faith and works and that religious faith is belief “energized by activity is the opinion held by Patrick Hartin. Hartin articulates in the *Sacra Pagina* the following determination:

Rhetorically, James’ thesis lies at the heart of Jewish faith and piety. His aim is to persuade his hearers/readers to put their faith into action. Neither a person’s profession of faith nor his or her ritual actions is sufficient. What is required is a life of deeds that embrace love and concern for others.¹⁵⁰

Again, the point of these verses is to point to the absurdity of the claim that one can possess faith without corresponding action. Since, James is drawing upon the tradition of “Jewish faith and piety” this would have challenged the religious sensibilities of his hearers. To further cement his point, he takes issue with this sort of faith profession by declaring that they “believe that God is one, you do well.” However,

¹⁴⁸ Adamson, *The Man and His Message*, 297.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁵⁰ Hartin, *Sacra Pagina* s.v. James, 157.

his thesis is that faith requires more than belief proposition. He tells them, “Even the demons believe and shudder.” In other words, the demons believe. Their faith is equal to that of his hearers in that respect. However, what separates the believer from the demon is that the demons match their belief with corresponding action. They shudder. This led to James’ seeking to illustrate his thesis by drawing upon the tradition of the Old Testament and offering the examples of Abraham and Rahab. The conclusion is obvious that faith and works or deeds are inseparable. Indeed the entirety of vv. 20-26 proper point to the illustrative impact of Abraham and Rahab. McCartney in reflecting on these verses suggests:

In 2:20-26 James presents two examples of genuine faith: Abraham and Rahab. But Abraham and Rahab are not just ‘illustrations’ in the sense of making more vivid what has already been shown. The examples of believer Abraham and believer Rahab themselves have probative force, and they help to define the nature of genuine faith. This is especially true of Abraham, whom James calls ‘our father’ (2:21). Just as ethnic Judaism regarded Abraham as the progenitor of the Jewish race, Christians understood Abraham as the progenitor of the spiritual race that encompassed many nationalities.¹⁵¹

Luke Timothy Johnson offered the following explanation related to the usage of Abraham and Rahab as appropriate examples of faith personified:

Abraham and Rahab had faith that was demonstrated by their actions. James’s choice of the testing of Abraham is particularly appropriate, for Abraham’s obedience was precisely an act of faith. In a sentence whose Greek is much clearer than either the NIV or the NRSV translation, James insists that the faith ‘co-worked the work’ and that faith was ‘brought to perfection/fulfillment’ by the deed. In other words, faith is the subject from beginning to end. Deeds do not replace faith; they complete it.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹McCartney, 161.

¹⁵²Johnson, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 198.

Johnson is referring to James' assertion contained in that twenty-second verse, "you see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did."¹⁵³ In commenting on the twenty-second verse, McCartney says:

In 2:22 James draws the practical conclusion from Abraham's justification: his faith 'cooperated,' 'worked together with' (*synergei*) his works, and faith is 'completed' (*eteleiothe*) by works, just as sin is completed by death in 1:15. This sounds at first like 'synergism,' but again we must remember that James is talking not about how one obtains a relationship with God, or how a sinner may hope to receive a verdict of 'not guilty' in the final judgment, but about the necessity of faith being completed by works. Thus, the 'synergism' in view is far from the notion that humans cooperate with God in their salvation. James rather is speaking about a person's faith operating in synergy with his or her works as an unfolding of the righteous life.¹⁵⁴

He further instructs "faith 'completed' by works is to say that it comes to its fruition."¹⁵⁵ In fact, the verb *teleioo* speaks of maturity, fruition, or completion.¹⁵⁶ According to the *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, in James 2:22 *teleioo* refers to the "perfecting, or completion of faith."¹⁵⁷ William Baker in his study of the ethical-spiritual dynamic in James best summarizes this point by suggesting:

Deeds emerge as the more important area for ethical-spiritual evaluation in 2:16, where speech is depicted as a totally inadequate way to meet the need of the person truly desperate for food and clothing. In situations like this, even sincere words of kindness are hypocritical. The rest of the discussion in 2:13-26 goes on to stress

¹⁵³Jas 2:22, (NIV).

¹⁵⁴McCartney, 169.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷Stephen D. Renn, ed. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 723.

that profession of faith without the accompanying works is useless.¹⁵⁸

James concludes with the re-statement and re-capitulation of his thesis that faith without corresponding action or works is dead or useless. The implication for the believer is that faith and works are inseparable.

Theological Foundation

The theological foundation for this project is practical theology. Practical theology as defined by Musser and Price “arises at the confluence of theological reflection and ecclesial action. It is critical and constructive reflection on the diverse experiences, understandings, and activities of the communities of faith, leading to both phronesis and transformation. ‘Phronesis’ denotes a practical wisdom that successfully interrelates the general and the particular. ‘Transformation’ embraces not only individuals and their communities, but also the world around them.”¹⁵⁹ There are three general characteristics of this theological paradigm. They are:

- 1) Practical theology focuses holistically on the entire range of dynamics that characterize life in a community of faith.
- 2) Practical theology acknowledges the key role of praxis in the achievement of new understandings. ‘Praxis’ denotes a dialectical integration of critical reasoning and creative action in a particular social setting, leading to both change and insight and calling for renewed engagement with the now-altered given situation.

¹⁵⁸William R. Baker, *Personal Speech-Ethics in the Epistle of James* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), 102.

¹⁵⁹Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, eds. *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 399-400.

- 3) Practical theology must necessarily develop a sufficient 'hermeneutic of situations'---a 'science of interpretation' that provides for today's situations what traditional hermeneutics does for the interpretation of biblical and other historical texts.¹⁶⁰

This insistence on developing a hermeneutic of situations is an important insight because it reminds us that theology, whether oriented toward practical, womanist or liberation "must be done in light of the cannon."¹⁶¹ Tyrone Inbody posits that our theology must be rooted in the authority of the Holy Writ. He cautions us, however:

This does not mean that the Bible is the only authority for Christian theology, or that nothing else matters as long as we have the Bible. It means that the Bible is the primary authority that authors and authorizes the distinctively Christian understanding of God.¹⁶²

Therefore, Practical theology is interpreted through the lens of scripture and rooted in the scriptural understanding of the structures and systems of the local church, particularly as it relates to maturing faith. It seeks to create a "dialectical integration of critical reasoning and creative action."¹⁶³ The task of the practical theologian or in most instances, Pastor is to facilitate that "dialectical integration" in order to foster change within a particular contextual milieu. This dialogue of reasoning and action has a specific aim.

The aim of practical theology is not only to understand the world, but also to change it—and even to be changed in the process. The formation and transformation of person-in-community, and of the

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 400.

¹⁶¹Tyrone Inbody, *The Faith of the Christian Church: An Introduction to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 37.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Musser and Price, 400.

environs impacted by them, are very much at the heart of practical theology's fundamental orientation.¹⁶⁴

The stated goal of this ministry project was to transform the attitudes, perspectives, and commitments of a group of leaders within a specific context. Practical theology then weds critical reasoning (thinking) and creative (action). This project sought to embrace this duality of critical reasoning and creative action with the expressed purpose of faith maturity through intentional faith formation beyond current levels of faith understanding and expression.

This writer understands that the role of the Pastor as practical theologian is to proclaim the gospel in such a way that critical reasoning is expanded and creative action is encouraged. In fact, Olin P. Moyd in his text, *The Sacred Art* suggests that this is the imperative of African American preaching in particular. He writes:

African American preaching for the future must be based on practical theology, not just theology for our heads, but theology for our feet, not just a theology to help the people to know something, but a theology to empower people to do something, to participate with God in the plan of realized social redemption in this world as well as eternal redemption in the world to come.¹⁶⁵

The writer agrees with Moyd and believes, theologically, that God calls and challenges us all to live lives of faith. However, in living lives of faith we are further challenged to live out our faith substantively and sacrificially and not merely superficially. A life of faith is invariably a life of sacrifice. It is a life where we sacrifice our time, talents, and treasures for the kingdom of God. More succinctly, the life of faith is a lifestyle. It was James Fowler, the father of Faith Development Theory who

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Olin P. Moyd. *The Sacred Art: Preaching and Theology in the African American Tradition* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 120.

suggested that faith encompasses all that we are. It is not a concept or reality just for Sunday or when dealing with issues of religion nor is it relegated to the life of the church. In fact, Fowler and others would argue that the life of faith is a way of being in the world. A way of living in which we find meaning in how we relate to God and others. According to the *Baker Theological Dictionary*, “Christians find their security and hope in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and say ‘amen’ to that unique relationship to God in the Holy Spirit through love and obedience as expressed in lives of discipleship and service.”¹⁶⁶ In other words, faith is about belief as well as behavior. The profession of the faithful should be reflected in the practices of the faithful. However, it is clear that tantamount to that type of faith is a firm belief, trust, and loyalty to a person or thing.

Theologically, this is the Old Testament understanding of faith. In fact, the Old Testament and the Hebrew language have six terms that develop the fundamental ideas of belief, trust, and loyalty.¹⁶⁷

- 1) The root *bth* expresses an individual’s feeling of safety, and so means to feel secure.
- 2) The term *hsh* describes the state of one in need of help who is dependent on another for protection.
- 3) The terms *qwh*, *yhl* and *hkh* express persistence, a simple hope, or a waiting for...these descriptions that express a hope in God that involves patience and persistence are expressions of faith.
- 4) The term *‘mn* with its stress on firmness and stability emphasizes the varied activities of God and our responses to him.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶*Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, 236.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*

These six terms clearly articulate a theological construct, which seeks to wed both the attitude and actions of those who believe in, trust in and are loyal to God. They reflect what Swartz articulates as the:

The recognition and acknowledgement of the relationship into which God enters with people is a declaratory ‘amen’ to God and a special religious attitude of the people of God. The commands of God demand a proper response. Individuals are to acknowledge his demands, regard him as trustworthy, and be obedient to him. Faith is a spiritual attitude involving activity.¹⁶⁹

The commands of God are intimately linked to the covenant between God and his people. According to Swartz this connection between command and covenant is where faith intersects. In fact, he declares, “the setting and origin of the term “faith” as used in the Old Testament are intimately linked with the covenant between God and his people. The term sums up all the ways by which people express their relationship to God.”¹⁷⁰ This suggests that “faith” is the recognition of a covenant with God that must be received in faith and responded to in faith, realizing that the God who established the covenant with the people was faithful. Therefore, the proper response is obedience to the commands of God. This is recognized as “faith” in the Old Testament.

The New Testament provides a continuum of thought as it relates to the understanding of faith theologically. According to Swartz, “the meaning of faith in the New Testament is then both a reflection of its continuity with the Old Testament and an expression of its uniqueness in a different historical and cultural setting.”¹⁷¹ The writer will now explore the continuity and the differences of the concept of faith as it is treated

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰Ibid, 237.

¹⁷¹Ibid.

in the New Testament, with particular emphasis on the Synoptic Gospels, the book of Acts and the Epistles.

The understanding of faith in the Synoptic Gospels is a “primary confident trust based on God’s promise as understood through his Word. In Jesus Christ, the living Word of God and the gospel, the true message of God, people are called to say ‘yes’ to God and to recognize the messenger and the message as true.”¹⁷²

Faith in the Synoptic Gospels is synonymous with trust in the person of Jesus Christ. Consistently throughout the Synoptic narratives Jesus responds to the faith of those with whom he interacts. Swartz makes this claim as he asserts, “the results of faith are seen in the radical changes that people experience when they place their trust in Jesus.

The Gospels make the faith response explicit in particular miracles.¹⁷³ A few examples of this dynamic of faith are found in Matthew 8:13, “the Centurions Servant” and in the healing of a paralytic in Matthew 9:2 as well as the healing stories recorded in Mark 5, with the recitation of a twelve year old girl and a woman with an issue of blood, which has plagued her for twelve years. In every instance, Jesus remarks, “your faith has healed you.”¹⁷⁴ Swartz argues, “To place one’s trust in Jesus is to open the door for radical change in the meaning of life itself.”¹⁷⁵ It is the radicalization to which Swartz points as the emphasis in the book of Acts. He says of the book of Acts, “in its record of

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 238.

the statements and activities of the early church, acts emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the focus of faith.”¹⁷⁶

The book of Acts serves as a bridge between the gospels and the epistles. Likewise, the faith embodied and expressed serve as a bridge between the Old Testament understanding and the New Testament undertaking of faith. This is expressed through the churches response to the gospel as message and as modeled through the person of Jesus Christ. Swartz articulated it this way, “the church, in responding to the example and words of Jesus radicalized the Old Testament meaning of faith.”¹⁷⁷

The word radicalized suggests radicalism, which according to the Collins English Dictionary consists of the “principles and practices of radicals; support or advocacy of extreme changes or reforms, especially in politics.”¹⁷⁸ The picture of the church in the New Testament is one of faith beyond mere belief. Their belief was reflected in their willingness to sacrifice for others and suffer on behalf of their belief in God. The writer does not feel that this radicalizing of Old Testament meaning of faith, which the church is called and commissioned to respond to has been actualized or fully realized in the modern church.

The writer contextualizes this radicalization of faith into three theological presuppositions about faith that are consistent with the Biblical understanding of faith. These three presuppositions if embraced and understood would in turn radicalize the faith within the local church context. The three aspects include—the relational aspect,

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Dictionary.Com, s.v. “Radicalism,” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/radicalism?> accessed April 2011).

the intentional aspect, and the transformational aspect. The writer believes that the embrace of these aspects would empower and engender the New Testament inspired radicalization of the twenty-first century church and provide it with a comprehensive theological foundation.

The Relational Aspect of Faith

The relational aspect of faith, speaks first and foremost to our relationship with God. It is covenantal. This aspect of faith understands that it is only through relationship with God through Jesus Christ that we will ever come to trust Him, believe in Him and put our confidence in Him. It is through the relational aspect that we come to know God, in the sense of experiencing his grace and mercy. It is through this knowledge that we come to understand that we can put our faith in a God who is faithful. We can trust in a God that is trustworthy. The unwillingness or inability to put our trust, confidence or believe in God in all situations and circumstances reveals a faith, which might be characterized as wavering.

Biblically, this is called double mindedness. James revealed that such a person is “unstable in all of their ways.” In fact, he says, “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be give him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is double-minded and unstable in all his ways.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹Jas 1:5-8, (ESV).

James and Wilder while “recognizing the importance of *fides quaerens intellectum*” suggested another task of the theologian. They posit that the task of the contemporary theologian is “*quaedrens intellegere fidem*” or seeking to understand faith.¹⁹⁰ They also assert that evangelical theologians and educators have put more focus on “*fides quaerens intellectum* than on *quaerens intellegere fidem*.”¹⁹¹ This writer understood the importance of both a faith that is understood as well as a faith that cannot yet be grasped in its totality. This project was predicated upon understanding faith in all of its complexities and nuances.

Kenneth Stokes in *Faith is a Verb* underscores this point declaring, “Faith is more than a doctrine, belief, religious law, or creed. It is more than something we receive from God, or learn in a confirmation class, or profess in a bar Mitzvah ceremony. Faith is always in process.”¹⁹² In other words, faith is not static but a dynamic reality, which can be experienced and expressed. It is in the words of Stokes dynamic. F. Gerrit Immink in his book *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction* provides insight into what a dynamic faith entails by asserting that faith is realized in our relationship with God and expressed in our relationships with others. He suggests:

Faith is, as a very part of its nature, a social and communicative event. It presupposes the presence of the Other, of God as well as other human beings. Faith is realized in intersubjective relationships... So it will hardly surprise us that the core of the praxis of faith is formed by the interaction between God and human beings, as well as among humans.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰Ibid.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²Kenneth Stokes, *Faith is A Verb* (Connecticut: Twenty Third Publications, 1989), 5.

¹⁹³F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 1.

Understood in this context, faith is not restricted to what we merely confess or profess but faith truly is a dynamic reality that is given expression in what we do. This is the writers understanding of faith as expressed by Sondra Matthaei, who defined faith as "actively seeking and discerning meaning in relationship to God, space then intentionally responding to God's action in our lives through Christian discipleship."¹⁹⁴ While the previously discussed doctrinal and theological understanding of faith is the ideal, according to Alister McGrath there has long been an issue reconciling what they call the "cognitive or epistemological aspects of faith and the soteriological aspects of faith."¹⁹⁵

Marcus Borg reflecting on faith ascertains that "faith is utterly central to the Christian life."¹⁹⁶ He is helpful to our discussion because he reminds us that in the history of Christianity there have been four primary meanings for faith.

The first meaning is faith as *Assensus* or assent.¹⁹⁷ This is a faith, which is dependent upon belief or on "giving one's mental assent to a proposition, as believing that a claim or statement is true."¹⁹⁸ The second meaning of faith is *Fiducia*, meaning faith as trust. It is in the words of Borg, a radical trust in God.¹⁹⁹ The third meaning of faith according to Borg is faith as *Fidelitas* or a faith marked by our faithfulness to our relationship with God. It means what faithfulness does in a committed human

¹⁹⁴Matthaei, *Making Disciples*, 20.

¹⁹⁵Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 238.

¹⁹⁶Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 28.

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*

relationship.”²⁰⁰ The final meaning of faith is faith as *Visio*. To Borg this is faith embraced as a “way of seeing.”²⁰¹ This way of seeing by necessity must extend beyond mere belief. This requires a shifting of paradigms because of the strictures of traditional thought.

Traditionally, McGrath reveals that since the enlightenment, faith was understood as a lower form of knowledge.²⁰² More specifically, it was understood as characterizing a partial knowledge that was marked by a degree of uncertainty, which was based upon a lack of evidence or evidence that was inadequate in its ability to convince.²⁰³ According to McGrath, Kant argued, “faith is basically a belief which is held on grounds that are subjectively adequate, but objectively inadequate.”²⁰⁴ Faith approached in this way is understood as an unwavering commitment to a belief in something or someone that is not totally supported by available facts. However, according to McGrath “faith, as understood within the Christian tradition, has both epistemological and soteriological aspects.”²⁰⁵

In other words, there is both a sense of knowing and doing inherent in the understanding of faith. The knowing and doing are not mutually exclusive. It is not a matter of either/or but correctly understood as both/and. A theology of faith anchored in

²⁰⁰Ibid.

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²McGrath. *Christian Theology*, 238.

²⁰³Ibid.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵Ibid.

scripture as well as consistently reflected within Christian tradition. Theologically, James Fowler planted The seeds of this both/and duality.

Theology Behind Faith Development

Faith Development theory is built on the groundbreaking works of James Fowler. Fowler began his work in 1968, while teaching at the Harvard Divinity School. Fowler's interest at the time was in developing a "practical theology that attends to and expresses the human experiences of growth and of awakening of faith."²⁰⁶ It was during this time that Fowler was introduced to the works of H. Richard Niehbur and Paul Tillich. According to Fowler, it was Neihbur and Tillich that provided for him the "theological starting points." In fact, Fowler pointed to the writings of Niebuhr through an unpublished manuscript titled *Faith on Earth* and Tillich's *Dynamic of Faith* as informative and influential in the genesis of his faith development theory. Faith according to Niebuhr was related to the universal concern and for Tillich it was understood in his language of ultimate concern. Fowler in summation and conversation with this concept wrote:

Tillich challenges his readers to ask themselves what values have centering power in their lives. The 'god values' in our lives are those things that concern us ultimately. Our real worship, our true devotion directs itself toward the objects of our ultimate concern. That ultimate concern may center finally in our own ego or its extensions—work, prestige and recognition, power and influence, wealth. One's ultimate may be invested in family, university, nation, or church. Love, sex, and a loved partner might be the passionate center of one's ultimate concern.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶James Fowler, "Faith Development at 30: Naming The Challenges of Faith in a New Millennium," *Religious Education* 99, (2004): 408.

²⁰⁷James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1981), 4.

This conceptualization of universal or ultimate concern according to Fowler “was a much more powerful matter than claimed belief in a creed or a set of doctrinal propositions. Faith as a state of being ultimately concerned may or may not find its expression in institutional or cultic religious forms. Faith so understood is very serious business. It involves how we make our life wagers.”²⁰⁸ In fact, he articulates the view that our ultimate concerns “shapes the ways we invest our deepest loves and our most costly loyalties.”²⁰⁹ Tillich in his seminal book the *Dynamics of Faith* sought to further clarify his thinking regarding “ultimate concern.” In the opening pages of that important text, he wrote:

Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man’s ultimate concern. Man, like every living being, is concerned about many things, above all about those, which condition his very existence, such as food and shelter. But man, in contrast to other living beings, has spiritual concerns—cognitive, aesthetic, social, and political.²¹⁰

He then illustrates this point by asserting “if a national group makes the life and growth of the nation its ultimate concern, it demands that all other concerns, economic well-being, health and life, family, aesthetic and cognitive truth, justice and humanity, be sacrificed.”²¹¹

Tillich by his broad definition suggested the object of our faith, which may or may not be religious in nature. Fowler, however, through his faith development theory

²⁰⁸Ibid., 4-5.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

²¹⁰Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1957), 1.

²¹¹Ibid., 2.

suggested the implications for our faith. His dependence on the language of Tillich is evident in defining the concept. In the article *Faith Development at 30* he says that:

Faith development theory suggests the implications of faith, and our relations to life and its Source, for ethics, for law, and for ordering the purposes of humankind. It aims to give ways of understanding faith, in its many dimensions and traditions, without being reductionistic.²¹²

By reductionistic Fowler was seeking to “displace the superficial understandings of faith seen as the product of merely projective and self-deceived forms of wish fulfillment.” James Fowler like Tillich before him seeks to apply a universal understanding to faith. Whereby he understands that faith is not a separate dimension of life nor in his understanding and construction is faith always religious”²¹³ In fact, he argues for quite the opposite by suggesting:

Faith is not always religious in its content or context. To ask these questions seriously of oneself or others does not necessarily mean to elicit answers about religious commitment or belief. Faith is a person or group’s way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives.²¹⁴

Underlying our faith in the thought of Fowler then is a “concern with how to put our lives together and with what will make life worth living. Moreover, we look for something to love that loves us, something to value that gives us value, and something to honor and respect that has the power to sustain our being.”²¹⁵ Fowler expanded this

²¹²Fowler, *Faith Development at 30*, 412.

²¹³Fowler, *Stages of faith*, p. 4.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*

²¹⁵*Ibid.*, 5.

thought in his work, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* in which he contextualized faith within the framework of human vocation. This led him to the following conclusion:

We find ourselves by giving ourselves. We become larger persons by devoting ourselves to the pursuit of a common good. From the standpoint of vocation, fulfillment, self-actualization, and excellence of being are by products of covenant faithfulness and action in the service of God and the neighbor. Rather than the golden figurine within, Christians see our potential as humans to be represented, as it says in Ephesians 4:13, 'in a mature personhood that partakes of the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Jesus Christ.' That's the secret of our potential; that's the goal of our development. It is a gift; it is a by-product of faithful response to the faithful love of God.²¹⁶

This faithful response for Fowler began in infancy. This is reflected in his rubric of faith development. This writer found Fowlers developmental theory important to the implementation of his project because of the median age of the participants in this ministry model.

The writer anticipated that this model would be beneficial in facilitating reflections related to the implementation of this ministry model. Fowler's model is particularly instructive as consideration is given to the ways in which the faith community assists in the impartation of the stories and beliefs that are foundational to faith. It is in this Intuitive-Predictive faith stage that a "child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the visible faith of primarily related adults"²¹⁷

²¹⁶Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 83.

²¹⁷Joann Wolski Conn, "Women Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development," Paulist Press, 1986, <http://faculty.plts.edu/gpence/html/fowler.htm> (accessed March 1, 2011).

This shows the importance that Christian education in the form of Bible study and church school plays in the development of faith. According to Fowler, it is in the conjunctive phase or stage five, where the “person faces up to the paradoxes of experience and begins to develop universal ideas and become oriented toward other people.”²¹⁸ In Fowlers construction, the ideal is the universalizing faith, “where a person becomes totally altruistic, and they feel an integral part of an all-inclusive sense of being.”²¹⁹ Joann Conn in speaking of that sixth stage of development:

Stage 6 is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. They are "contagious" in the sense that they create zones of liberation from the social, political, economic and ideological shackles we place and endure on human futurity. Living with felt participation in a power that unifies and transforms the world, Universalizers are often experienced as subversive of the structures (including religious structures) by which we sustain our individual and corporate survival, security and significance. Many persons in this stage die at the hands of those whom they hope to change. Universalizers are often more honored and revered after death than during their lives. The rare persons who may be described by this stage have a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, simpler, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us. Their community is universal in extent. Particularities are cherished because they are vessels of the universal, and thereby valuable apart from any utilitarian considerations. Life is both loved and held to loosely. Such persons are ready for fellowship with persons at any of the other stages and from any other faith tradition²²⁰

²¹⁸Chart attached, http://changingminds.org/explanations/learning/fowler_stage.htm (Accessed March 2011).

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰<http://faculty.plts.edu/gpence/html/fowler.htm> (accessed March 1, 2011).

Like Tillich before, Fowler understood that faith can be universal. Tillich, however, does not concern himself with the practical dimensions of faith and merely focuses on the philosophical underpinnings of faith. Fowler is more concerned with the practical dimensions. Despite their divergent aims or goals, they both understood faith in terms of a universal and ultimate concern.

However, neither Tillich nor Fowler was the first to wrestle with this concept of faith being rooted in the *priori* of ultimate concern. The concrete expression of ultimate concern can be seen historically in the life of the early Church. It is evident in those post Pentecostal days that the early church community was searching for ways to make very real and tangible their experience and expression of faith. They were searching for a language of faith. Innately, they seemed to understand how the language of faith contributed to the development of authentic faith. They understood as Samuel Laeuchli points out:

Christian language is speech from faith to faith (Rom 1:17). By speaking the language of faith; we grow in this very faith and understand, in turn, more deeply what this language contains. When the authentication of faith lies in this faith itself, it lies in a life of such faith and not merely in its intellectual recognition. As a Christian speaking the language of faith, I belong to the earthly assembly of this faith, the church of Jesus Christ...all language about the Christ contains a relevant urgency concerning daily life and is not merely an abstraction concerning earthly existence.²²¹

In an attempt to create a language of faith, Tillich and others rooted faith in the generalization of ultimate concern. However, for the believer the ultimate concern was realized in the embodiment and expression of their faith. The early church showed their ultimate concern by the adoption of a language of faith. This language of faith in turn

²²¹ Samuel Laeuchli, *The Language of Faith: An Introduction to the Semantic Dilemma of the Early Church* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1962), 236-237.

engendered activity, which was reflective of their faith language. This appropriation of a faith language was significant. In that it provided the impetus for their activities.

Furthermore, it is significant because it did not find expression in the language of the philosophers but rather in the language of their sacred texts and traditions.

The language of Christian faith arises from the canon, contains the traditions of the Christian churches and speaks to the present-day congregation...such language is meant to praise God and to worship him in the corporate adoration of the church no less than in the meditation of the individual, in confession, adoration, and intercession, as well as in the intellectual and ethical deliberations of the Christian mind. But praise in worship must become praise in service.²²²

This writer recognizes that any “Christian community that praises God lives in the world.”²²³ A relevant question to consider is how does the Christian community live in the world? This was the challenge of the early church and it remains the challenge of the 21st century church. Culturally, these two churches existed in distinctly different and divergent cultures. The issues that face and plague the 21st century are much more nuanced than they were in the first century; however, the challenge remained the same, living as a Christian community within the larger community and cultural context. This is particularly critical question as it relates to our faith. This writer agrees with Laeuchli that “the man who has discovered faith is sent into the world.”²²⁴ He further contends, “faith, and love, praise and communication; the perpendicular and the vertical—between these two dimensions oscillates the language of Christian faith. We hear and we respond; we

²²²Ibid., 237.

²²³Ibid.

²²⁴Ibid.

praise and we serve.”²²⁵ It is into this tension that we enter as a community of faith.

Nevertheless, as has been stated earlier it is not a new tension but an ongoing one. As we too, wrestle with the appropriate ways in which to translate the sacred text and tradition into an appropriate language of faith.

Yet we can be assured of the possibility of the task, because such a language of faith despite the tension has been realized and expressed. This is evidenced in the 2nd chapter of Acts beginning in the 42nd verse, where it records “and they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”²²⁶ It is obvious from this revelation that the early church understood faith not only in terms of their relationship to God but also in their relationship to one another and the larger communal context. In other words, their ultimate concern was revealed in their fellowship but also in their partnership with God in his redemptive work in the world. The challenge of that community and all communities of faith is in the appropriation of a living faith. More specifically, the maturing of such faith to the extent that congregants or members are able to identify the locus of their ultimate concern and in some tangible way express said faith.

However, Fowler is also instructive because he helps us to understand the difficulty many persons face when attempting to communicate a real, dynamic and life

²²⁵Ibid.

²²⁶Acts 2:42-45, (ESV).

affirming faith as we have discussed in this document. This difficulty is partly due to the limitations of our faith language. In fact, in *Stages of Faith*, Fowler admits:

The English language handicaps us when we try to speak of faith. It gives us no verb form of the word. As we have seen, the Greek verb *pistuo* and the Latin verb *credo* permitted writers and speakers to say, "I trust, I commit myself, I rest my heart upon, I pledge allegiance." All of the paraphrases show us that faith is a verb; it is an active mode of being and committing, a way of moving into and giving shape to our experiences of life. They also show us that faith is always relational; there is always another in faith.²²⁷

Fowler, in essence, is talking about the universalizing effect of faith. He suggests that faith can be applied to anything or anyone to whom one commits or pledges allegiance. In his understanding, faith is universal in its application but is also, relational, triadic or covenantal in shape and to which persons commit to "centers of value and power."²²⁸ He argues persuasively that this commitment is oftentimes not volitional, voluntary or because we ought to.²²⁹ Rather it is the result of what he suggests is our awareness of the intrinsic excellence or worth²³⁰ of the one to whom we commit:

We invest or devote ourselves because the other to which we commit has, for us, an intrinsic excellence or worth and because it promises to confer value on us. We value that which seems of transcendent worth and in relation to which our lives have worth. Further, in a world of powerful forces that have an impact on us, enlarging and diminishing us, forming and sometimes destroying us, we invest loyalty in and seek to align ourselves with powers that promise to sustain our lives and to undergird 'more being.'²³¹

²²⁷Fowler, *Stages Of Faith*, 16.

²²⁸Ibid, 18.

²²⁹Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹Ibid.

The influence of Tillich is recognizable and undeniable. We experience and express our faith based on what for us embodies our ultimate concern. In fact, Fowler posits, “our commitments and trusts shape our identities.”²³² Particularly, as it relates to our communal affiliations; in a real sense, “we become part of that which we love and trust.”²³³ This faith identity becomes the context by which we share with others who are similarly related in faith. It is within these, communities of love and trust, where we “serve common goals, we hold shared meanings, we remember shared stories, we celebrate and renew common hopes.”²³⁴ It is within these communities of love and trust where a common faith identity is formed and nurtured. Fowler identifies at least three ways in which this faith identity is expressed. Drawing from the works of H. Richard Niebuhr, he proposes the following:

1. Polytheistic Faith Identity, which is marked by the lack of any one “center of value and power of sufficient transcendence to focus and order one’s life.”²³⁵
2. Henotheistic Faith Identity, which is characterized by the appropriation of “centers of value and power”, which are “extensions and guarantors of the worth and significance of the self. Success, power, prestige, wealth, fame and the like are not ends in themselves. They serve, rather as guarantors of the worth and significance of the self.”²³⁶
3. Radical Monotheism, as understood, in the faith construction of Fowler “Rarely finds consistent and long lasting actualization in persons or communities. People too easily lapse into a confusion of our representations of a transcendent center of value and power

²³²Ibid.

²³³Ibid.

²³⁴Ibid, 19.

²³⁵Ibid.

²³⁶Ibid, 21.

with that reality itself. We continually feel the pull towards henotheistic and polytheistic forms of faith. But as a regulative principle, as a critical ideal against which to keep our partial faiths from becoming idolatrous, radical monotheism is of tremendous importance. If we regard the future of humankind as requiring our learning to live in an inclusive, global community, then in a sense, radical monotheistic faith depicts the form of our universal 'coming faith.' It becomes terribly important for us to work with this understanding of faith and try to formulate and symbolize it so that it exerts truly transformative power over our more parochial faith orientations."²³⁷

Fowler's description of faith identities in general and their expression within the faith community specifically reveal another dimension of faith development. Namely, he reveals the dynamic nature of faith. This dynamism is expressed in the relationship between being and doing. On the one hand, it is reflected in the gathering together centered in relationship and fellowship, with one another and ultimately with the Holy Other. On the other hand, it is representative of the covenant we enjoy with the eternal and expressed in our commitment to our neighbors. For Fowler in the development of his thesis and thinking, it reveals the interconnectedness of what he calls covenant and vocation. In fact, he argues in *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, that "Covenant and vocation go together."²³⁸ He further recognizes:

In a covenant community persons with different callings are bound together with common loyalties to a cause or to beliefs and values that are bigger than they. It does not particularly matter whether the persons like one another or not. It is not important whether they would have chosen to be yoked together or tied up with these particular others or not. In a covenant community, for the sake of shared loyalty to the cause for which the community came into being, they work at relations of mutual trust and loyalty with their

²³⁷Ibid.

²³⁸Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, 35.

companions in community, and with the cause that animates its purpose.²³⁹

Fowler's description is consistent with his earlier description of faith in its generalities. However, he seeks to provide specificity to his understanding of covenant community. He explicitly describes the church as a covenant community, which "derives its purposes from the will and intent of the One who initiates the covenant and calls us into covenant relation. It exists for partnership in God's creative work, God's work of judgment and governance, and God's work of redemption and liberation."²⁴⁰ This writer agrees that this is the work of the church and it is the profile of faith identity, which must be embraced in and exercised by the church. Fowler reminds us of that importance by suggesting:

We do well to remember that in the Christian classic, the central paradigm for human cooperation in the liberative and redemptive work of God is to be found in the incarnation—God's becoming human and submitting to death on the cross. At the heart of the Christian understanding of incarnation is the reality of *kenosis*—literally, the self-emptying, the pouring out of the very self of God.²⁴¹

This tacit suggestion reminds us that we are called to cooperate with God in the work of God in the world. It reminds us that we have a purpose, which extends beyond our Sunday morning worship. This sought of cooperation moves us beyond the centeredness of self toward a more empathetic expression of our faith. In short, it means an embrace of the Christ and His suffering. Fowler again proves insightful:

²³⁹Ibid.

²⁴⁰Ibid.

²⁴¹Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, 50.

To be part of the liberative and redemptive work of God means entering into solidarity with Christ and his suffering. It therefore means solidarity with those among whom he said he would be found, the 'little ones'---the oppressed, the sick, the poor, the prisoner, the widow, the orphan, the addict, the leper, the AIDS victim, the missing ones²⁴²

This is particularly important to the writer who understands the dire circumstances many persons face on a day-to-day and ongoing basis. Fowler is right that "if our solidarity with Christ is genuine, we too will not be exempt from the pain of God."²⁴³ Particularly, as Fowler later surmises;

In a country where governmental support for unemployment and healthcare are increasingly declining, many in our communities find themselves in serious need of medical care in coping with chronic medical challenges, or in providing childcare and assistance for singles working long hours outside their homes. Churches are gearing up to help address these needs, both through practices of hands-on care, and through practices of influencing or mobilizing public and private organizations to extend their care.²⁴⁴

This summation points to the proper response of a community of faith in covenant relationship with God for the express purpose of being intentional partners with God in the work of redemption and liberation. The church must choose to be intentional. As Fowler articulates that "the struggle over doctrine, or with defending the Christian tradition from the attacks of the 'despisers of religion,' are not front and center." Rather, the reclaiming of practices must be the principle thrust.²⁴⁵ In this way, faith development is dualistic in its expression. Faith must develop on both the vertical and horizontal

²⁴²Ibid, 51.

²⁴³Ibid.

²⁴⁴James Fowler, *Faith Development at 30*, 419.

²⁴⁵Ibid.

continuum. It must be intentionally pursued to the extent that one's faith in God as well as their service for God is continually growing or maturing.

For Fowler, this meant looking at faith development from the perspective and within the context of life span. Fowler discovered:

Some of the most interesting and powerful faith stage transitions occur only in adulthood. Faith, as seen here, involves an ongoing process, of forming and reforming our ways of being in and seeing the world. One who becomes Christian in childhood, for example, may indeed remain Christian all of his or her life. But one's way of being Christian will need to deepen, expand, and be reconstituted several times in pilgrimage of faith.²⁴⁶

This is how Jones and Wilder understand the dynamic of faith development from a Christian perspective. In fact, in their article entitled "Christian Formation" they write that a Christian approach to faith development should be "characterized" by the following attributes:

1. A Christian approach to faith development should be centered in content that is both particular and personal.
2. A Christian approach to faith development should be understood as inseparable from the theological construct of sanctification.
3. A Christian approach to faith development should reflect the crucial role of the faith community.²⁴⁷

In other words, the approach should be centered in the respective contextual milieu of the person or community committed toward a developing faith. This commitment must be understood as an ongoing process of sanctification that is best engendered within the faith community.

²⁴⁶Fowler, *Faith Development and Fowler*, 37.

²⁴⁷Jones and Wilder, *Christian Formation*, 191.

This writer contends that ultimately faith maturity can and should be approached and applied in a similar manner. More importantly, the writer posits whether the designation is faith development or faith maturity the intended outcome is the same.

Faith Maturity

The writer contends that the maturation of faith is developed as a result of being connected to a covenant community committed to the redemptive and liberating work of God in the world. This understanding and undertaking of faith, represents for the writer a dynamic, vibrant, life affirming faith. Whereas for Fowler, faith is developed over the span of time and coincides with life cycles, it is this writer's contention that faith can be matured, intentionally and systematically, regardless of where the person is on the life cycle continuum. However, the writer does agree with Fowler "the language, rituals, and teachings of particular communities of faith are of critical importance for faith development."²⁴⁸ Additionally, the writer agrees with Fowler that we should respect the individual's present place of faith.²⁴⁹ The final place of agreement for this writer with the thoughts of Fowler is in his insistence that a theory of faith development "overcome the tendency to think of faith as separate from everyday life."²⁵⁰

While this project is not about faith development or Fowlers theory, his thoughts are helpful in contextualizing this project. This project's main focus is measuring and fostering faith maturity. What this writer discovered is that many of the concerns of faith

²⁴⁸Fowler, 39.

²⁴⁹Ibid.

²⁵⁰Ibid.

development are the concerns of faith maturity. This writer was concerned with where the participants were in their faith journey. In addition, the writer was convinced that through the language, rituals and teachings of the community of faith in an intentional way would facilitate their faith maturity. However, a baseline had to be established.

The ultimate question that undergirded this project was can faith be assessed and if so how is it assessed or measured? In fact, this was one of the original research questions. More specifically, “the key issue becomes one of describing the signs, in behavior, posture, and attitude, that faith—real, dynamic, life-affirming faith—is at work.”²⁵¹ If defining faith is varied and nuanced, imagine the subtle nuances that emerge when one attempts to describe and define faith maturity.

Yet, this is the work that Peter Benson, Michael Donahue, and Joseph Erickson sought to undertake as they wrestled with what it meant to embody a maturing or mature faith. In their effort, to determine what maturing faith looked like, they understood the need to define not only the task but also the term—faith maturity. Cognizant of the difficulty of defining faith and unwilling to become entangled in the debate as to whether faith could be measured, they decided to look at what they called the “priorities, commitments and perspectives”, which in their minds constituted a mature or maturing faith. They defined faith maturity as the “degree to which a person embodies the priorities, commitments, and perspectives characteristic of vibrant and life-transforming faith.”²⁵² These writers were guided by the notion that “faith maturity is evidenced more

²⁵¹Peter Benson, Michael J. Donahue and Joseph A. Erickson, *The Faith Maturity Scale*, 3.

²⁵²Peter Benson, Michael J. Donahue, and Joseph A. Erickson. “*The Faith Maturity Scale: Conceptualization, Measurement and Empirical Validation*,” abstract, *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 5 (1993): 3.

by value and behavioral consequences than by right belief, although some indicators of faith maturity, particularly in the core dimension called ‘trusts and believes,’ are statements of classical Christian belief.” In fact, they were more concerned with what they called the ‘consequential dimensions’ or ‘fruits of faith’ as a primary focus.”²⁵³

This led the research team of Benson, Donahue and Erickson to settle upon a criteria-based approach, which was based upon the following eight criteria and considerations:

1. Faith maturity occurs along a continuum, with measurement based on the degree to which its indicators are present. Each indicator is given equal weight.
2. There are multiple core dimensions of faith maturity, and the scale should include an approximately equal number of indicators in each dimension. A mature faith assumes the integration of multiple dimensions.
3. The core dimensions of a mature-faith measure should prominently reflect the theological territory covered by two themes found in most faith traditions, both Christian and non-Christian. One is about the self, including one’s personal relationship to God, one’s efforts to seek God, and the personal transformation one experiences in this divine encounter. This theme might be called vertical, agentic, or ‘love of God’ faith. Strength on this theme without balance from the second theme could be understood as individualism-preserving religion. (Benson and Williams 1986). The second theme is about obligation and action on the human plane. It has to do with heeding the call to social service and social justice. While all faith traditions embrace this dimension, it is particularly salient in mainline Protestantism. This theme could be called horizontal, communal, or ‘love of neighbor’ faith. Strength in this theme without balance from the first indicates a social concern that is not undergirded by traditional religious themes. Faith maturity is understood as a balanced integration of these two themes.

²⁵³Benson, 3-4.

1. The scale should have heuristic value to allow its use in educational settings as a method for explaining and discussing the nature of faith maturity.
2. The length of the instrument and its response format should make it useful for evaluation purposes, to detect change following program interventions.
3. The scale should minimize economic, educational, and racial-ethnic specificity.
4. The indicators of faith maturity should not presume an institutional attachment or involvement.
5. The core dimensions and their sampled indicators should focus on common understandings within multiple denominations, thereby minimizing denominational specificity.

The identification of the eight-fold criteria was followed by the identification of the eight core dimensions of faith maturity. They proposed the following eight developmental strategies:

1. Trusts in God's saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus;
2. Experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace;
3. Integrates faith and life, seeing work, family social relationships, and political choices as part of one's religious life;
4. Seeks spiritual growth through study, reflections, prayer and discussion with others;
5. Seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another;
6. Holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality, affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others;
7. Advocates social and global change to bring about greater social justice; and

8. Serves humanity, consistently and passionately, through acts of love and justice.²⁵⁴

Utilizing these eight core dimensions, the writers created a thirty eight (38) Item index, which was designed to measure the eight core dimensions quantitatively. According to the writers particular works were beneficial and “valuable in identifying the indicators.” Namely, they referenced “Spilka’s *committed and consensual religion*; Fowlers *faith development theory*; Duncombe’s effort to *identify religiously significant behavior* and Malony’s work on *optimal religious functioning*.”²⁵⁵ Utilizing these resources and references, they constructed the Faith Maturity Index as a means of measurement. Their effort allowed this writer to utilize this instrument to assess/measure the current “priorities, commitments and perspectives” of his leadership team. The emphasis was on utilizing a research methodology that would allow for a truthful reflection on the faith practices, identities and attitudes of those participating in this project. The writer believed that this index met that requirement.

The Mature Faith Index

- 1) I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor.
- 2) I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again.
- 3) My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day.
- 4) I help others with their religious questions and struggles
- 5) I tend to be critical of other people. ®

²⁵⁴Ibid., 6.

²⁵⁵Ibid.

- 6) In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs.
- 7) My faith helps me know right from wrong.
- 8) I do things to help protect the environment.
- 9) I devote time to reading and studying the Bible.
- 10) I have a hard time accepting myself. ®
- 11) Every day I see evidence that God is active in the world.
- 12) I take excellent care of my physical health.
- 13) I am active in efforts to promote social justice.
- 14) I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.
- 15) I take time for periods of prayer or meditation.
- 16) I am active in efforts to promote world peace.
- 17) I accept people whose religious beliefs are different from mine.
- 18) I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.
- 19) As I grow older, my understanding of God changes.
- 20) I feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities and obligations I have.
- 21) I give significant portions of my time and money to help other people.
- 22) I speak out for equality for women and minorities.
- 23) I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people.
- 24) My life is filled with meaning and purpose.
- 25) I do not understand how a loving God can allow so much pain and suffering in the world. ®

- 26) I believe that I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved. ®
- 27) I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis no matter how serious.
- 28) I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the United States and throughout the world.
- 29) I try to apply my faith to political and social issues.
- 30) My life is committed to Jesus Christ.
- 31) I talk with other people about my faith.
- 32) My life is filled with stress and anxiety.
- 33) I go out of my way to show love to people I meet.
- 34) I have a real sense that God is guiding me.
- 35) I do not want the churches of this nation getting involved in political issues ®
- 36) I like to worship and pray with others.
- 37) I think Christians must be about the business of creating international understanding and harmony.
- 38) I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation.²⁵⁶

It was through this 38-item Maturity of Faith index that two major themes emerged—the vertical and horizontal theme. More specifically, these writers identified that three of the eight dimensions reflected aspects of vertical religiousness. They are trusts and believe, experience the fruits of faith, and seek, spiritual growth. The other three dimensions of holds life-affirming values, advocates social change, and acts and serves reflected a horizontal religiousness.²⁵⁷ More specifically, the “vertical theme

²⁵⁶Ibid., 8.

²⁵⁷*The Faith Maturity Scale*, 6.

measured the degree to which one has developed a deep, life-transforming relationship to a loving God” and the “horizontal theme was defined as the actions designed to promote the welfare of others.”²⁵⁸

The core dimensions and the respective 38 indicators were matched to determine the applicable and specific indicator, which supported the dimension in question, they are as follows with corresponding scale item in parenthesis:

Vertical

- 1) Trusts and believes
 - a. Sees God as both transcendent and immanent (11)
 - b. Accepts both the divinity and humanity of Jesus (2)
 - c. Reconciles God’s love and human suffering (25)
 - d. Accepts God’s love as unconditional (26)
 - e. Experiences God’s guidance in daily life. (34)
- 2) Experiences the fruits of faith
 - a. Feels liberated, set free. (20)
 - b. Experiences meaning and purpose in life. (24)
 - c. Experiences a sense of peace. (32)
 - d. Has a deep sense of personal security. (27)
 - e. Experiences self-acceptance. (10)
- 3) Seeks spiritual growth
 - a. Affirms the faith is a journey that necessitates continuing change in belief and meaning. (19)

²⁵⁸Peter L. Benson, Dorothy Williams and Carolyn Elkin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990), 25.

- b. Seeks to increase biblical knowledge and understanding. (9)
- c. Frequently engages in private prayer or meditation. (15)
- d. Seeks opportunities for spiritual growth. (14)

Horizontal

4) Holds life-affirming values

- a. Pursues a healthy lifestyle. (12)
- b. Feels responsible for promoting human welfare. (18)
- c. Affirms religious diversity. (17)
- d. Embraces gender and racial equality. (22)
- e. Is accepting of other people. (5)
- f. Affirms the sanctity of creation. (38)

5) Advocates social change

- a. Is committed to reducing poverty. (1)
- b. Advocates social and political change to improve human welfare. (28)
- c. Believes faith demands global concern. (37)
- d. Believes the church belongs in the public sphere. (35)

6) Acts and serves

- a. Responds to others with compassion and sensitivity. (21)
- b. Engages in actions to protect the ecology. (8)
- c. Devotes time and energy to acts of social service. (21)
- d. Devotes time and energy to promoting social justice. (13)
- e. Devotes time and energy to promoting world peace. (16)²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹Benson, Williams and Eklun, *Faith Maturity Scale*, 7.

These six dimensions were determined to be representative of the embodiment of an integrated faith. The writers concluded that a “person with a mature faith embodies both of these dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal into an integrated whole.” The writers expressed their findings using the designations of undeveloped faith, vertical faith, horizontal faith, and integrated faith. This is reflected in the table below:

Faith Type	Vertical	Horizontal
	Theme	Theme
Underdeveloped	Low	Low
Vertical faith	High	Low
Horizontal faith	Low	High

According to the table, underdeveloped faith is characterized by low maturity both vertically and horizontally. A faith that was identified, as more vertical was higher in the vertical domain than it was in the horizontal domain, which suggested that the respondent’s faith, was defined more by their relationship to God than to others. Conversely, a faith that was horizontal, meaning that it was lower in the vertical dimension and higher in the horizontal dimension. This suggested that the respondent’s relationship with others took greater precedents over their relationship with God.

The final category of integrated faith was high in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions, which suggested to the writers a mature faith. A faith that was both vibrant and transformative. A faith that reflected both a connection to God and a concern for

those whom the late Dr. Miles Jones would designate as the “other one for whom Christ also died.”²⁶⁰

This category of faith reflected a faith that was both experienced and expressed beyond just creedal confessions and professions and embodied a practical dimension, which took seriously the problems, plights, and pathologies one encountered in the world. An integrated faith or a person whose faith identity was integrated took seriously their relationship with God and with their neighbor. They were conscious of their covenantal relationship with God as well as the commandment to show their love toward others by serving others. This integrated faith reflected a mature faith. The interventions employed by this writer were intended to create an awareness of this dynamic understanding of faith, while systematically and intentionally moving the participants in this project toward the intended ideal. The results of that effort will be discussed later in this document.

Faith Formation

One of the questions, this writer sought to answer through the implementation of this project is, “how does one think about faith theologically”? Richard Dickey in his short guide, *“What is Theological Reflection?”* suggests:

To reflect theologically is an essential element in faith formation. It is a principal means of integrating faith and life. To reflect on one’s circumstances in life is a natural as breathing. It is that innate capacity and necessity that characterizes our human condition. It is that same capacity which enables us to recognize a reality greater than ourselves. To reflect on our life experiences in light of this greater reality is to reflect ‘theo-logically.’ It is to open us to the possibility of ‘knowing’ and ‘being known’ by what some call the ‘Holy Other.’ Such reflection draws us into the realm of faith. It

²⁶⁰Miles Jones would often offer that formulation in prayers at the Providence Park Baptist Church.

grounds us in an unseen reality, alters our way of 'seeing' and shapes our responses in all of life's relationships.²⁶¹

A corollary question that this writer sought to answer through the implementation of this project was, "how does one grow or mature in faith?" These two questions have been pondered since the beginning of the early church. Jones and Wilder remind us in their essay, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* that "despite the fact that growth in faith is praised throughout the New Testament, Scripture provides no explicit step-by-step sequence for this growth."²⁶² They further inquire, "how, then, is it possible to assess whether or how an individual's faith is developing in a healthy way?"²⁶³

In order to answer the question, the writer has worked to propose a working definition of faith. In this section, the writer is concerned with defining "formation."

John Sullivan defines formation as a long term deliberate, and multifaceted process that seeks to produce a character of substance, one who is thoroughly inducted into the way of life in a particular community and tradition.²⁶⁴ This suggests that faith formation must be intentional, it must not as Fowler would posit be left to life development processes or the varying stages of one's life cycle. This hands-off approach would most certainly lead to Christians who were undeveloped and not maturing in their

²⁶¹Richard Dickey, "What is Theological Reflection," http://www.ans.edu/pdf/Theological_Reflection_Handbook_Section_R_Dickey.pdf (Accessed February 12, 2012).

²⁶²Timothy Jones and Michael Wilder. "Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development," in Faith Development and Christian Formation, ed. James Estep and Jonathan Kim (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Company, 2010), 162.

²⁶³Ibid.

²⁶⁴John Sullivan, *Communicating Faith* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 4.

faith. This approach would lead to the continuing phenomena of persons who have been long standing members of churches, even serving in positions of leadership who have not matured in their faith. This has had the negative side effect of producing persons who do not understand what constitutes the Christian life in a practical way. However, the mandate is clear that if maturing believers is the aim of the church, it must be the mission and mandate of every church. This realization led Matthaëi to posit, “it is imperative for each local church...to consider how we contribute to faith formation for holiness of heart and life.”²⁶⁵ It is her assertion that it is the local churches responsibility and must become “imperative” that the church takes seriously its role in what she calls the formative task. For her, the formative task of the church is to pass on the Christian faith tradition. Quoting Thomas Frank she argues, “most people experience a denomination only at their own particular point of entry—in a local congregation of a certain community.”²⁶⁶ From that she extrapolates the following conclusion:

Persons are going to learn the belief, values, and identity of their denominational tradition through participation in the life and witness of a particular congregation. This growth in faith occurs not just through religious instruction or religious experience, but through a combination of influences such as worship, witness, study, prayer, service, and fellowship that shape our faith through participation in the life of the church.²⁶⁷

This insight is important for several reasons first it seeks to remind us of the importance of participation within a particular body of believers. Second it reminds us that it is through the participation in a local body of believers that beliefs, values, and

²⁶⁵Matthaëi, *Making Disciples*, 21.

²⁶⁶*Ibid.*

²⁶⁷*Ibid.*

identity are transmitted. Finally, and most importantly for this project, it reminds us that through participation within a local body of believers that one's identity, particularly Christian identity can be shaped. In fact, Matthaëi articulates that point, when she posits:

One benefit of focusing on faith formation is that it causes us to assess what it is that constitutes the Christian life. Faith formation instills Christian values and beliefs and guides the development of a Christian lifestyle so that each person might respond in faith to God's prevenient grace. The process of faith formation nurtures Christian identity and vocation in disciples who are called to do God's work in the world.²⁶⁸

This introduces another important element necessary to understand faith formation and that is the development of Christian vocation. John Wesley according to Matthaëi understands Christian vocation as “knowing and receiving assurance of a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ and increasing in holiness—love of God and neighbor—through the perfecting work of the Holy Spirit.”²⁶⁹ She also quotes Charles Foster who asserts, “the purpose of church education...is to ‘build up’ or construct communities of faith to praise God and serve neighbors for the sake of ‘emancipatory transformation of the world.’”²⁷⁰

Clearly, the purpose of adopting a Christian lifestyle or embracing our Christian Vocation as understood by Wesley, Matthaëi or Foster is so that the work, will, and ways of God will be manifested in the world. The import of faith formation then is the maturing of believers who understand the balance of worship and works, membership and discipleship, profession and praxis. In fact, Matthaëi suggests that as we grow in

²⁶⁸Ibid.

²⁶⁹Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁰Ibid.

faith, “we become partners with God in doing God’s work in the world. And God’s work is the work of love—loving God and loving our neighbor.”²⁷¹

This idea of collaborating with God to do the work of God in the world is not a novel idea, it is the message that was communicated by Jesus himself. Jesus said that the greatest command was to Love God with all that we were, are, and have and to love our neighbors, as ourselves. The call to a faith formation that takes serious the call, and command is what Matthaëi and Wesley before her are advocating. In fact, “for John Wesley, Christian vocation is a life of holiness, characterized as “faith working in love.” This faith working in love was marked by a love of God. This inward expression, which Wesley identified as the “holiness of the heart” and an outward expression, he labeled as the “holiness of life.”²⁷²

Holiness of Heart and Life

The summation of John Wesley’s teaching on the Holiness of heart and life are a creative recapitulation of the teachings of Jesus in response to what is the greatest command. To this inquiry Jesus responded to “love God with everything and to love our neighbors as we love our selves. For Wesley, loving God constituted the holiness of heart. Wesley in his sermon “The Almost Christian” described it this way:

For thus saith (God’s) Word: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Such a love of God is this as engrosses the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire

²⁷¹Ibid., 25.

²⁷²Ibid., 25-26.

capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties.²⁷³

Matthaei in her work *Making Disciples* references Charles Yrigoyen Jr. who described Holiness of heart in the following way. He said “ Inward holiness involves total commitment to God, singleness of intention, centering of one’s life completely on God. It includes believing in, trusting, loving, worshipping, and obeying God. It consists of constant reliance on God’s grace and using the gifts God gives to become what God intends us to be.”²⁷⁴

This inward holiness or holiness of the heart requires total commitment to God and the things of God. It is as Yrigoyen identifies it as a singleness of intention. Understood in this way it provides the believer with direction and purpose. However, it also challenges the notion of self-reliance and independence separate from God. We are called and challenged to live a life of reliance and dependence on Him. At once, our prayer must be “Thy Kingdom come and thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven, give us this day, our daily bread.”²⁷⁵ A life of devotion and dependence are the marks of what Wesley deemed the Holiness of heart. However, as Matthaei quickly points out “faith working in love also means outward evidence of a new relationship with God as expressed through love of neighbor or social holinessholiness of life.”²⁷⁶ Matthaei quoting Yrigoyen wrote “outward holiness entails the manner in which we show our love

²⁷³ John Wesley, Sermon #2, Vol. 1.

²⁷⁴ Matthaei, *Making Disciples*, 25.

²⁷⁵ Segment of the Lord’s Prayer

²⁷⁶ Matthaei, *Making Disciples*, 26.

for God in our love for our neighbors, remembering that the neighbor is anyone and everyone else.²⁷⁷

The embodiment of a holiness of both heart and life requires the exaltation of God as well as the embrace of our neighbors. It is both God and other directed. It is reflected in our praise and worship as well as in our prayers for others. It is evident in our giving of ourselves to God as well as in our giving of our time, talents and treasures to and for others. The embodiment of holiness in both heart and life requires a radical shift in the ways in which we think about faith and the ways in which we express our faith. It certainly requires us to be intentional about formation particularly in the area of faith. It necessitates a theology of faith that is broader than just intellectual assent or religious knowledge. It clamors for a redefining of the language of faith or a reimagining of what it means to be intentional about faith formation. At the very least, it warrants serious consideration of what Matthaëi proposes as the adoption of a “ecology of formation for holiness of heart and life.” In her estimation, this requires that the church in our time:

Needs to create a Wesleyan ecology of formation for holiness of heart and life that includes preaching and witness to the good news of God’s grace, ongoing instruction and nurture in the faith, pastoral care to support persons on their journeys of faith, opportunities for service in behalf of our neighbors and fellowship with other Christians on the journey.²⁷⁸

This ecological focus allows the church to be intentional in its preaching and teaching ministries. The purpose of such intentionality is to engender faith maturity. Thomas Frank had it right, “what we are looking for here are the practices that enable

²⁷⁷Ibid., 26.

²⁷⁸Ibid., 34.

people to grow in the knowledge and love of God and to become communities of witness and service.”

This writer felt that the means of impacting the faith maturity of his congregation was through the existing Christian educational modality within his context. He was further strengthened in this opinion by the findings of the Search Institute. It was their finding that “effective Christian education is the most powerful single influence congregations have on maturity of faith.” They argue, “While other factors matter, nothing matters more than effective Christian education.”²⁷⁹

This recognition was tempered by the reality that “challenge arises from the evidence that many of the factors needed for effectiveness in Christian education are not currently operating in large numbers of congregations.”²⁸⁰ It was the search institutes assertion that was required was to make Christian education a priority in the church. They further argue, “if congregations heed the call for strengthening Christian education, many of the problems now plaguing mainline denominations may be arrested, including the highly-publicized loss of members and the equally troubling problem of member inactivity.”²⁸¹ Their conclusion was revealing, they posit, “In revitalizing Christian education, one key task is to achieve a dramatic increase in the percent of members involved in Christian education at all levels.”²⁸² This became evident to this writer immediately. It became apparent that there were not enough opportunities within the existing church Christian Education program to meet the faith needs of its membership.

²⁷⁹Benson, Donahue and Erickson, *Effective Christian Education*, 3.

²⁸⁰*Ibid.*

²⁸¹*Ibid.*

²⁸²*Ibid.*

Therefore, the church leadership was merely a reflection of the inability of the church at large to provide adequate education opportunities.

Undeterred by this revelation, this writer took the position that Christian education would provide the foundation to meet the faith maturity needs of the church leaders at Mount Zion. He also believed that within the confines of the program and with the limitations on project implementation that a varied approach would potentially yield significantly greater results. Ultimately, the writer believed that a multi-dimensional approach would allow him to meet the learning needs of every member of the leadership team, whether they were primarily an auditory, kinesthetic or visual learner. Each part of the intervention was designed to target one or more of those learning styles.

Finally, the writer intentionally designed questions used during the small group encounters that were based on Blooms Taxonomy of Learning Domains. This construction of learning domains has changed in recent years, however, this writer used the old paradigm of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Particular emphasis was given to knowledge through the preaching and teaching opportunities. Comprehension was measured through our small groups as was the application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The idea was to establish a baseline of knowledge and to build upon that foundation. The writer discovered a need for a sustainable program and plan that would assist in the ongoing project of faith development, maturity, and formation. The writer came to this conclusion through reflecting on the writing of Sandra Higgins Matthaei.

Toward a Ministry of Forming Faith

Matthaei provides important insight for any leader, pastor, or teacher who is interested in taking seriously the call to faith formation. In her text, *Formation in Faith*, she orients us by acknowledging, “Our goal in forming faith is to help pilgrims in faith discover their own gifts and find ways to use them in a vocation of loving God and neighbor in servant ministry.”²⁸³ Establishing that goal, she outlines a process which persons within the faith may mature community in their faith and more importantly, ways in which that faith community may be intentionally engaged in a “ministry of forming faith.”²⁸⁴ In reflecting on the task of faith formation she suggests the following:

1. Christian Faith Formation is a process over a lifetime.
2. Christian Faith Formation means cultivating the inner life of growing in our relationship with God and taking on the mind of Christ, as well as the outer witness to God’s love, a vocation of loving our neighbor.
3. Christian Faith Formation helps persons claim their Christian identity: coming to know oneself as a Christian, having assimilated the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of one who professes to be a follower of Jesus Christ through study, discernment, and reflection in order to bring life experience into dialogue with the tradition of the church.
4. Christian Faith Formation helps persons discern and prepare for their Christian vocation: carrying on God’s work in the world through servant ministry.²⁸⁵

According to Mattahei, the purpose of Christian Faith Formation is transformation. By transformation she understands it as a divine gift. She says specifically, “Transformation is God’s

²⁸³Sondra Matthaei, *Formation in Faith: The Congregational Ministry of Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 89.

²⁸⁴*Ibid.*

²⁸⁵*Ibid.*

gift and changes a person's relationship with God and God's creation. The evidence of this transformation is seen in a person's daily life through words and actions."²⁸⁶

The end result of faith formation, therefore, is the transformation of the person, who in turn understands that their vocation is to be a transformative agent in the world. This transformation, as discussed previously is engendered within community and through the vehicle of Christian Education. This project was based upon the hypothesis that within the contextual milieu of the writer this transformation would occur as the result of engagement in the spiritual disciplines as well as the varying facets of Christian education. Again Jones and Wilder are instructive because in their model:

Spiritual growth is not the result of movement through a static series of stages in which the individual discards one perspective and progresses to another. Growth begins with and is driven by personal allegiance to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—coupled with assent to specific truths about God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ as revealed in Holy Scripture. This two-sided coin of allegiance and assent is what the Scholastics identified as *fides explicita*. The believer does not leave behind his or her initial faith in the process of sanctification.

Ultimately, this is the premise of faith maturity. It further speaks to why the writer decided to pursue faith maturity as opposed to faith development. The writer in faith development theory encountered a static theory. Wherein, he recognized in faith maturity a flexibility, which honored the faith journey of the participants. This writer adopted a multi-dimensional approach to faith formation, which not only honored the faith journeys of participants but which also sought to take into consideration divergent learning styles. This writer discovered that the methodologies employed within the discipline of Christian Education may be varied, however, it must be driven by intentionality.

²⁸⁶Ibid.

This relational aspect properly understood leads to a radicalization of faith, whereby the believer comes to understand that it is God's desire to "give you a future and a hope."¹⁸⁰ And it is through our faith in Him that we come to experience that future hope. This is particularly poignant as it relates to our salvation. Paul is clear that it is through our faith in God through Christ that we are justified. It is because of our faith in the atoning work of Christ on the cross that we can be assured of eternal life. Therefore, the relational resolution speaks to our relationship with God and how that undergirds of faith as well as guarantees our future. However, this resolution also has another dimension that must be explored.

This relational resolution must have an outward manifestation. In other words, there must be an expression of said faith that manifest itself in work and deeds toward and for others. Therefore, rightly understood there is a sense of accountability inherent in the relational aspect of faith. The adherent of faith is at one point accountable to God while simultaneously accountable to others in the community and world at large. It is this accountability to the other that gives ultimate purpose to the faith relationship between God and one another as well as us.

The Intentional Aspect of Faith

The early church demonstrated their faith in God through their relational interactions with others. They sought to express their relationship with God through Jesus Christ by intentionally loving, caring for and sharing with one another. They were in a word intentional. This suggests that there is an intentional aspect of faith. This intentionality is observed most powerfully in 2nd chapter of Acts. It is in that important

¹⁸⁰Jer 29:11, (ESV).

chapter where we get a glimpse of faith radicalized. In that chapter we are presented with a model of how faith within an intentional community might look.

The narrative account tells the faith story of the early church. The passage suggests “all the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”¹⁸¹

The Transformational Aspect of Faith

This aspect of faith recognizes that faith that is relationally centered, in our relationship with God and others as well as intentionally focused on the expression of that faith is transformational in its impact. The Bible is replete with instances of faith expressed in a dynamic and transformative way. Old Testament examples such as the crossing of the Red Sea, The possession of the promised land, the defeat of Goliath and the raising of the widow’s son by the prophet Elijah. The New Testament provides further evidence through the various miracles and healing narratives of Jesus such as the feeding of the five thousand, the healing of those with various diseases and the raising of Lazarus from the Dead. However, this transformational impact of faith continues in the Acts of the Apostles as the Disciples Peter and John, in the name of Jesus, restore activity to dead limbs. Overall, this writer believes like Longenecker that:

The theme of the faith of Abraham in the New Testament, in fact, has a number of facts to it, and each possesses its own vitality as well as serves

¹⁸¹ Acts 2:42-47, (NIV).

to enhance the whole: Faith is a wholehearted response to God in Christ, apart from a person's own attempt to gain merit as Paul has stressed in countering the Judaizers; it is that which results in acts of positive helpfulness and kindness with respect to the physical needs of others, as James has emphasized in combatting a perversion of Christian doctrine."¹⁸²

The New Testament of understanding is one of response and reorientation toward God. It understands that this is not an enterprise of merit but rather of grace. It further embraces both a Pauline and Jamesian theological hermeneutic realizing that both are necessary for a balanced faith. As Logenecker reminds us:

Theologically, it is possible to be so enamored with the realized factor in our relationship with God as to minimize the incompleteness of that relationship and ignore the forward orientation of Christian faith—or, conversely, to become so wrapped up with the future hope, either turning it into some type of gnostic speculation or reserving all fulfillment for the future, as to fail to appreciate the presence of God here and now and the transformation of life that can take place because of his contemporary presence.¹⁸³

Thematically and theologically the impetus is the same as it relates to faith. Faith is both God directed and other focused while simultaneously being present centered and future oriented. Faith is both and it is not an either or proposition.

Howard Stone and James O. Duke in their book, *How to Think Theologically*, argue that our understanding of faith must be balanced between orthodoxy (correct belief) and orthopraxy (correct practice). They write that orthodoxy in their estimation is more than just giving "lip service to the faith while acting as if other concerns are more

¹⁸²Longenecker, 211.

¹⁸³Ibid.

important than the God revealed in Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁴ Likewise, they posit that orthopraxy without theological reflection is no more beneficial than orthodoxy without active commitment.¹⁸⁵ They further surmise:

There is a belief component in orthopraxy, for it involves not only a belief that God wills us to act in a certain way rather than some other way but also a belief that how we act is more telling than what we say we believe. Emphasis on orthopraxy has always been modified by warnings against merely going through motions that appear truly Christian while covertly, in our heart of hearts, devoting ourselves to someone other than God and something other than God's message.¹⁸⁶

This understanding leads them to proffer:

The Christian message of God calls for both beliefs and actions. It also elicits an emotional response of love, trust, and dedication. Thus the word faith is often used, as we will use it here, as a comprehensive term for all elements of the Christian life: belief, action, and heartfelt devotion to God as the object of ultimate concern in a living faith.¹⁸⁷

Finally, they suggest as it relates to faith seeking understanding:

As theologians we seek to understand what we believe about the Christian message of God, and how we as individuals and as a community are to live in light of that message.¹⁸⁸

This has been the theological conversation for centuries since the eleventh century AD, when Anselm of Canterbury “summarized the task of the Christian theologian.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴Howard Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 9.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹Timothy Jones and Michael Wilder, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James Estep and Jonathan Kim (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2010), 163.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This ministry project used the primary methodology of Action Research. Active research is a “deliberate, solution-oriented investigation that are group or personally owned and conducted. It is characterized by spiraling cycles of problem identification, systematic data collection, reflection, analysis, data-driven action taken, and finally, problem redefinition.”¹

Greenwood and Levin assert that Action Research is defined as “social research carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action writer and the members of an organization, community, or network (‘stakeholders’) who are seeking to improve the participants’ situation.”² They further assert that action research is predicated upon a “commitment to democratic social transformation through research, analysis, and action design.”³ Specifically, this writer selected a qualitative research design as:

A means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis

¹Kemmis and McTaggart, *Introduction to Action research*, “What is Action research?”

²Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research*, 2nd ed.: *Social Research for Social Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 3.

³Ibid.

inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the writer making interpretations of the meaning of the data.⁴

This research project was conducted and designed to incorporate the aforementioned qualities. The writer started with the research question of could the faith maturity be assessed and if so would it show growth or maturity after a period of intentional interventions. The project was supported by context and professional associates who provided guidance, insight, and support throughout the process. However, without the covenanted commitment of the leadership of the Mount Zion Baptist Church it would not have been possible to complete the project. The overall purpose of which was to “create a kind of liberation through greater self-realization.”⁵

It was the hope of the writer that participation in this project would lead to a greater level of self-realization and revelation.

Hypothesis

In a national study of protestant congregations exploring effective Christian Education, the publishers designed a study to evaluate and ultimately strengthen congregationally based Christian Education. Specifically of interest to this project was the fact that it was designed to “assess the maturity of faith of adolescents, Christian educators, pastors and other adults.”⁶ To test their assumptions regarding the assessment and development of a maturing faith, they proposed the hypothesis to “establish the

⁴John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 4.

⁵Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action research*, 6.

⁶Benson, Williams and Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*, 3.

features of congregational life that promotes faith maturity and loyalty.” This hypothesis influenced the hypothesis of this ministry model.

The hypothesis of this ministry model was that the church leadership within the writer’s context would show an increase in faith maturity scores following the implementation of targeted interventions as evidenced by an increase in the faith maturity scale assessment. More specifically, the writer formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The average Trusts and Believes scale scores of church leaders will increase following their participation in a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program.

Hypothesis 2: The average Experiences the Fruits of Faith scale scores of church leaders will increase following their participation in a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program.

Hypothesis 3: The average Integrates Faith and Life scale scores of church leaders will increase following their participation in a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program.

Hypothesis 4: The average Seeks Spiritual Growth scale scores of church leaders will increase following their participation in a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program.

Hypothesis 5: The average Experiences and Nurtures Faith and Community scale scores of church leaders will increase following their participation in a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program.

Hypothesis 6: The average Holds Life-Affirming Values scale scores of church leaders will increase following their participation in a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program.

Hypothesis 7: The average Advocates Social Change scale scores of church leaders will increase following their participation in a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program.

Hypothesis 8: The average Acts and Serves scale scores of church leaders will increase following their participation in a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program.

The writer further hypothesized that a series of sermons over the course of three months, supported by faith specific bible study, supplemented by assigned reading related to faith and undergirded by the spiritual disciplines would have a positive impact on the faith maturity scores of the participants as well as their overall spiritual development.

Description of the Intervention (Ministry Project)

This ministry project consisted of several primary components. The writer used Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models. The purpose of this section is to outline the various components utilized by this writer. A description and the rationale for utilization will be explored and discussed.

The first component of this project consisted of an introductory meeting with the targeted group of leaders to explain the project and the proposed series of interventions. This meeting detailed the purpose of the study and answered any questions regarding the implementation of the project. During this meeting, each leader was asked to covenant with the writer during the implementation of this project. A sample of the covenant agreement is listed in the appendix A of this document.

The second component consisted of administering the Faith Maturity Scale. The Faith Maturity Scale was used as a means of assessing the current attitudes, priorities and commitments toward faith. In order to protect identity and ensure anonymity each leader

was assigned a number and was recorded with the following designations, leader 1, leader 2, leader 3, etc. This assessment is listed as Appendix B.

The third component was the implementation of interventions, which in consultation with context associates were determined to be the most likely to be effective given the parameters of the project. The interventions took sought to exhaust the topic of faith. They consisted of three mini-sermon series related to faith. These sermon series covered such topics as defining and describing faith to profiles in faith, with a particular focus on Enoch, Moses, Abraham, and Sarah as well as a treatment on the book of James. These sermons were preached during our regular 11 A.M. service. The sermons were constructed and delivered using the dialectical method of sermon writing. There are samples provided in the appendix. The writer was greatly indebted to the writing and wisdom of Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor, who wrote in “How Shall They Hear?”

There was always a reason for preaching a certain theme; an antithesis waited to be exposed and laid out before the people---a condition that needed to be changed, an error in public circulation that needed to be corrected, a mood of despair that had to be dissipated, a sin that called for repentance, a dullness of spirit that needed the water of life, or a hunger for righteousness waiting for the living bread. My proposition was the answer to such an antithesis, and when it was clear to me, I enlarged the proposition into my thesis.⁷

The writer utilized this methodology of sermon construction and delivery to support the Jamesian thesis that “faith without works is useless.” Like, Dr. Proctor the writer sought to use the text to synthesize the thesis and the anti-thesis. The writer sought to synthesize his proposed thesis and the perceived anti-thesis using a model of

⁷Samuel Dewitt Proctor, “*How Shall They Hear?*”: *Effective Preaching for Vital Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1992), 10.

expository preaching. This writer agrees with Peter Adam who offered the following reasons for preaching expositionally:

1. Expository sermons help us to let God set the agenda for our lives.
2. Expository preaching treats the Bible as God treated it, respecting the particular contexts, history, and style of the human authors.
3. This kind of preaching gives ample time for us to make clear the context of the Bible passage from which we are preaching.⁸

While this is a departure from the strict Proctor model, it has been beneficial to this writer. Utilizing this model, the writer preached a series of sermons from the book of James that explored the following topics, “A faith that overcomes”, “A faith that Works”, “A faith that controls the tongue”, “A faith that leads to unity” and a “faith that prays.” The series on the Book of James was supplemented with a focus in Bible Study that allowed us to delve deeper into the subject of “Faith in Action” or interactive faith. This Bible study was conducted during our regular Wednesday Bible Study sessions. Each topic corresponded with a chapter of James and was directly tied to the message preached on Sunday. All leadership covenanted to be a part of those sessions. The major emphasis of this study was to explore in a more direct and intentional way, the characteristics of faith in action, particularly as James presented it. Each session allowed for discussion of the previous weeks sermon, a period of direct Bible Study and breakout sessions to further discuss the concepts raised during Bible Study. Samples of the sermons preached and Bible study taught are included in Appendices C and D, respectively.

In addition, the leaders who participated in this study read the book, “Crazy Faith.” They were afforded the opportunity through the critical reading of that text to

⁸Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 128.

explore various dimensions of what Pastor Susan Smith called Crazy Faith. This book was chosen because it spoke directly to the issue of faith but also provided contemporary illustrations, which allowed the readers to bridge the chasm of “then and now.” The chapters we considered together were, Why Faith?, God’s ridiculous Expectations, and How shall they eat? to name a few. Each chapter ended with a crazy-faith challenge. Each challenge was designed to offer the reader a challenging thought to encourage them to move beyond the pages of the book. These crazy faith challenges were also discussed in the small group setting.

Each small group discussion was lead and facilitated by one of the associate ministers of the church. The purpose was to provide another means of affecting the attitudes, priorities, and commitments of the leadership. This approach was based upon Morton Kelsey’s parish model for educating Christians. This model was articulated in his work, *Can Christians Be Educated*. It was in that important text that he offered the following justification for seminar based learning. He wrote:

For the individual who can read for himself, the lecture method is a bore---except in those rare instances where the teacher is either a dramatist or a clown. In the seminar method, the students read the material before coming to the group. They then bring their questions and doubts, as well as any special information, into the group interaction. Here teachers are able to bring their knowledge and experience directly to bear upon the needs of students as individual problems are revealed. Thus they are able to deal with individual needs in a way that is usually not possible.⁹

His rationale is simple yet profound:

If Christians want to share their religion with others, they must know the nature of the persons they are teaching, their uniqueness, their hang-ups, their backgrounds, and how they can be taught.

⁹Morton Kelsey, *Can Christians Be Educated? Ed. 1*. (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1977), 11.

This is at the heart of Jesus' stress on the individual and on loving the individual.¹⁰

This project sought to take seriously this challenge of not merely viewing the participants as blank tablets who needed to be taught something but as individuals who brought to the teaching moment and small group encounter a unique set of opinions and values that needed to be expressed and valued within the community of learning. The seminars allowed us to be true to that ideal. Each seminar small group was held immediately after our regular Bible Study was dismissed and was facilitated by one of our associate ministers. It was held from 8 P.M. to 8:30 P.M. for five consecutive Wednesdays. Each group consisted of approximately four leaders and each week the composition of the group changed. In addition, to discussing the Bible Study lesson and the crazy faith challenge each group was faced with two primary questions. The first question, "What resonated with you in the reading of the chapters under consideration?" A corollary question connected to that first question was why did they feel that what they shared resonated so profoundly with them?" The second question we raised was, "How did the readings in the chapters under consideration affirm or challenge your attitude, priorities or commitments related to your faith?" The first question was a more general question designed to engender discussion, while the second question sought to engender deeper reflection on the question of faith and its place in the life of the leader and by extension the church.

The fourth component of this project consisted of the same group of leaders being administered the Faith Maturity Scale. The purpose of the post assessment was to measure the effectiveness of the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models. This

¹⁰Ibid., 12.

assessment was administered to the same group of leaders, utilizing the same set of questions and was careful to maintain the same level of confidentiality and anonymity as the pre-assessment. The final component consisted of the writer analyzing the data with the assistance of his professional associates. The two sample, paired t-test was used to analyze the data. The t test was used because it would tell the writer “whether the difference between the before and after numbers is genuine or whether this difference could merely have been the result of chance.”¹¹ More specifically, “the t test is a statistical test used to test whether means of populations are different. In the t test, a t value is calculated based upon the difference in the means and variances of the two populations. The greater the t value, the more certain it is that the means are different.”¹² The two-sample paired t-test for means “evaluates whether the average difference between the before and after measurements is greater than zero or not. In other words, this test evaluates within a specified degree of certainty whether the average measured difference between before and after is real or could have occurred merely by chance.”¹³ The analysis of the data will be discussed later.

Undergirding the whole project was the insistence by the writer that the participants engage in an intentional way in the spiritual disciplines of scripture reading, prayer and meditation and journaling. Cognizant of the time constraints of many of the leadership team, the writer taught them the method of Lectio Divina. The Lectio Divina is an ancient method of reading, meditating on and praying the scriptures that were used by

¹¹Mark Harmon, *t-Tests in Excel: The Complete Guide*, <http://excelmasterseries.com/NewManuals.php>, 16.

¹²*Ibid.*, 17.

¹³*Ibid.*

the early fathers and mothers of our faith. It is a method that this writer was introduced to in seminary and which has become a part of his life practice. The Lectio Divina consists of four parts. They are outlined below:

The Lectio Divina

1. *Lectio* or lection (reading of the text). The primary emphasis is on what does the passage say?
2. *Meditatio* or meditation (to reflect on the text in a meditative way). The primary emphasis is on what does the passage say to me?
3. *Oratio* or oration (to pray the text or to pray to God regarding some aspect of the text). The primary emphasis of this stage is to determine what is my response to the truth discovered in the passage of scripture?
4. *Contemplatio* or contemplation (to reflect on what God revealed through His word). The final consideration is what is the Lord asking of me?¹⁴

This approach was adopted in the hopes that it would facilitate the exercise of all of the disciplines in a singular and simplified way. The writer provided several scriptural references to faith, trust, and belief and asked each leader to submit to the discipline of the Lectio Divina. These scriptural references are found in appendix E of this document. They were then asked to journal their reflections. Periodically, throughout the project opportunity was given for the expression of some of those reflections. While not every leader participated in this aspect of the project, those who did reflected that the process made them feel closer to God and “helped them through a period of dryness in their devotional life.” One respondent suggested “this process gave me the courage to share my story and testimony about God with others.”

¹⁴Lectio Divina, <http://communio.stblogs.org/2010/11/the-steps-of-lectio-divina.html> (Accessed May 2011).

This final response reveals the reason the writer chose to employ the Lectio Divina. The Lectio Divina is designed to engender a final stage, which is Actio or action. The utilization of the Lectio Divina was purposeful in that it was intentional about creating opportunities for communion and communication with God. In the hopes, that through the stages of Oratio and Contemplatio persons would be convinced of their need to partner with God in the world. It is this level of intentionality and consistency that this writer sought to encourage.

The overall purpose of incorporating the Lectio Divina and the other disciplines was to facilitate their movement toward action or into what Craig Dykstra calls “living into the practices.” The writer agrees with Dykstra in regards to how persons are formed or fostered in faith and adopted his understanding that:

People come to faith and grow in faith and in the life of faith by participating in the practices of the Christian Community. These are practices of the whole church. Because an to the extent that the church is faithful in its practice, it makes available to itself and to the world ‘external means’ by which the gift of God’s Word and presence may come to persons and take root in them. Those who participate in these practices are involving themselves ever more deeply in processes by which faith may come, grow and mature.¹⁵

The key word and concept in this is practice. The point being that through the “practice” the “gift of God’s Word and presence” materialize in the life of the practitioner and are ultimately manifested through that life. This suggests that the efficacy of the initiative was based solely on the willingness of the participants to engage in and maintain the practices outlined. The implication being as Dykstra argues:

People come to faith and grow in the life of faith in the context of these practices as they themselves, participating in them actively,

¹⁵Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 1 ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999), 44.

actually do what these practices involve. We engage in them personally in particular physical and material settings and in face-to-face interaction with other people. It is not enough simply to know about them or think about them or observe other people engaging in them. Each of us must actually pray, read the Scriptures and interpret them, and provide hospitality to strangers.¹⁶

This writer agrees with Dykstra and sees within the method described the foundation to the balanced faith this project proposes.

¹⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

This chapter discusses the implementation of the faith maturity ministry project and specifically outlines the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models employed during the implementation phase of this project. The objective was to assess the current faith maturity level of the leadership team within the writer's context and then to measure the faith maturity levels after the implementation of the interventions. The overall purpose of the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models, were designed to produce attitudinal and behavioral changes in the faith perspective and priorities of participants.

The pre-test in the form of a 38 item self-assessment was distributed on Sunday, April 3rd, 2011. The participants were given a week to return the assessment with a deadline of April 10, 2006. The assessment was administered to 17 leaders of the Mount Zion Baptist Church. Once the assessments were returned each assessment was given an alpha-numeric designation corresponding with the order in which assessment was received. Only the writer knew the identity of each assessment. The post-test assessment was assigned the same alpha-numeric designation.

The pre-test was submitted for data computation but was not analyzed until after the post-test and at the completion of the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models. As stated earlier in this document, the pre and post assessment was a 38 item Mature Faith Index. Again the index was designed to "measure the degree to which a person embodies

the priorities, commitments, and perspectives characteristic of vibrant and life-transforming faith, as these have been understood in ‘mainline’ protestant traditions.”¹ This definition and this index, “intentionally focused on values and behavioral manifestations or indicators of faith rather than exclusively on an assent to particular religious beliefs or tenets.”² In addition, the index contained statements, which the participants were asked to respond to the assessment statements using a Likert Scale. Statements five, ten, twenty-five, twenty-six and thirty-five were designed to be reverse scored.

- 1) I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor.
- 2) I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again.
- 3) My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day.
- 4) I help others with their religious questions and struggles
- 5) I tend to be critical of other people. ®
- 6) In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs.
- 7) My faith helps me know right from wrong.
- 8) I do things to help protect the environment.
- 9) I devote time to reading and studying the Bible.
- 10) I have a hard time accepting myself. ®
- 11) Every day I see evidence that God is active in the world.
- 12) I take excellent care of my physical health.

¹Benson, Donahue and Erickson, *The Faith Maturity Scale*, 3.

²Theresa Tisdale, review of Faith Maturity Scale, by Benson, Donahue and Erickson, <http://phd.mshaffer.com/projects/religiosity/FaithMaturityScale.pdf>. (accessed March 2011).

- 13) I am active in efforts to promote social justice.
- 14) I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.
- 15) I take time for periods of prayer or meditation.
- 16) I am active in efforts to promote world peace.
- 17) I accept people whose religious beliefs are different from mine.
- 18) I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.
- 19) As I grow older, my understanding of God changes.
- 20) I feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities and obligations I have.
- 21) I give significant portions of my time and money to help other people.
- 22) I speak out for equality for women and minorities.
- 23) I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people.
- 24) My life is filled with meaning and purpose.
- 25) I do not understand how a loving God can allow so much pain and suffering in the world. ®
- 26) I believe that I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved. ®
- 27) I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis no matter how serious.
- 28) I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the United States and throughout the world.
- 29) I try to apply my faith to political and social issues.
- 30) My life is committed to Jesus Christ.
- 31) I talk with other people about my faith.
- 32) My life is filled with stress and anxiety.

- 33) I go out of my way to show love to people I meet.
- 34) I have a real sense that God is guiding me.
- 35) I do not want the churches of this nation getting involved in political issues®
- 36) I like to worship and pray with others.
- 37) I think Christians must be about the business of creating international understanding and harmony.
- 38) I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation

The Likert Scale was designed to yield a “global faith maturity score within a potential range of scores”³ between one and seven:

- 1=Never True
- 2=Rarely True
- 3=True once in a while
- 4=Sometimes true
- 5=Often true
- 6=Almost true
- 7=Always true

Again, the same pre and post assessment were administered. This approach was utilized to measure whether there were any attitudinal or behavioral changes after the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models employed by the writer.

The writer preached a series of sermons in April from the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The purpose of this sermon series was to provide a foundational understanding of faith in the life of the believer. The series was entitled Faith Matters. The second series

³Ibid.

of sermons was entitled “Profiles in Faith” and focused on the faith life of Abraham as recorded in the book of Hebrews. This series was preached through the month of May. The purpose of this series of sermons was to identify Abraham as a biblical/theological paradigm or model of integrated faith. The third and final series of sermons was preached in June and finished on the first Sunday in July. The series was entitled, “Interactive Faith” and was taken from the book of James. The sermon titles were a “faith that perseveres”, a “faith that moves beyond doubt”, a faith that produces fruit”, a “faith that produces unity” and a “faith that prays.” The purpose of this series of sermons was to provide practical and personal application to foster and facilitate a life of faith.

The final preaching series was supplemented by a Bible Study series, entitled “Interactive Faith HD” that was intended to support the preaching and provide an opportunity for deeper reflection in how to apply the principles of faith in the life of the participants. Each Bible study consisted of a thematic and a deeper Biblical study. The thematic component of the Bible study allowed the participants to discuss in greater depth the previously preached sermon. After this thematic study, each respective chapter of the book of James was discussed in greater detail to further explore the truths contained within each chapter.

The Results of the Model

A paired-samples t-test was employed to study the impact of a Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program on church leaders’ faith maturity. Data analysis showed that there was no significant difference ($t = -1.72$, $p = 0.106$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 5.176, Standard Deviation = .613) and post-test scores (Mean = 5.348, Standard

Deviation = .604) on the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS). To further explore the impact of the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model program, each scale of the FMS was analyzed. Data analysis showed that there was no significant difference ($t = 1.64$, $p = 0.120$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 5.788, Standard Deviation = .862) and post-test scores (Mean = 5.318, Standard Deviation = .510) on the Trusts and Believes scale of the FMS. This result suggests that the interventions did not increase church leaders' scores on the Trusts and Believes scale.

Statistical results showed that there was a significant difference ($t = -3.08$, $p = 0.007$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 4.200, Standard Deviation = .846) and post-test scores (Mean = 4.906, Standard Deviation = .772) on the Experiences the Fruits of Faith scale of the FMS. This result suggests that the interventions did increase church leaders' scores on the Experiences the Fruits and Faith scale. Results also showed that there was no significant difference ($t = -1.10$, $p = 0.288$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 5.941, Standard Deviation = .685) and post-test scores (Mean = 6.024, Standard Deviation = .696) on the Integrates Faith and Life scale. Results also showed that there was no significant difference ($t = -1.19$, $p = 0.251$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 5.765, Standard Deviation = .877) and post-test scores (Mean = 5.941, Standard Deviation = .653) on the Seeks Spiritual Growth scale. Results also demonstrated that there was no significant difference ($t = -0.80$, $p = 0.436$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 5.824, Standard Deviation = .860) and post-test scores (Mean = 5.926, Standard Deviation = .784) on the Experiences and Nurtures Faith and Community scale. Statistical results showed that there was a significant difference ($t = -2.32$, $p = 0.034$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 4.814, Standard Deviation = .759) and post-test scores (Mean = 5.157, Standard

Deviation = .942) on the Hold Life-Affirming Values scale on the FMS. This result suggests that the interventions did increase church leaders' scores on the Hold Life-Affirming Values scale.

Data also showed that there was no significant difference ($t = -1.00$, $p = 0.332$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 5.074, Standard Deviation = 1.158) and post-test scores (Mean = 5.353, Standard Deviation = .956) on the Advocates Social Change scale. Statistical results also showed that there was no significant difference ($t = -0.95$, $p = 0.356$) in the pre-test scores (Mean = 4.306, Standard Deviation = 1.164) and post-test scores (Mean = 4.435, Standard Deviation = 1.295) on the Acts and Serves scale.

This data is reflected in the following tables and graphs below to provide a visual representation for the aforementioned information.

Table 1
Paired Samples T-test Summary on the FMS

	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	5.176	.613	5.348	.604	.172	.413	.106

* $p < .10$

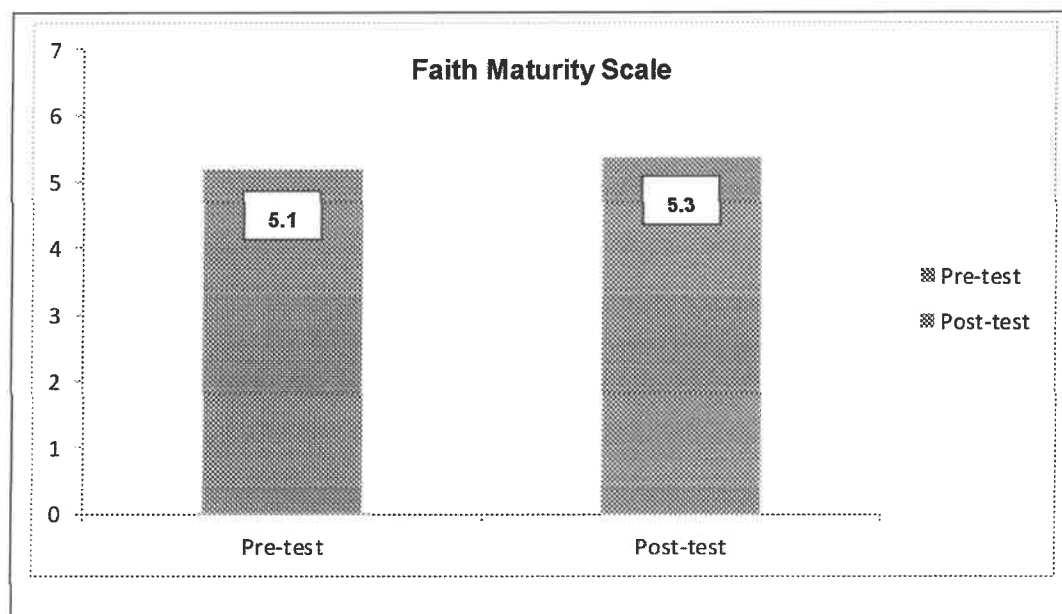


Table 2*Paired Samples T-test Summary on the Trusts and Believes Scale of the FMS*

	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	5.788	.862	5.318	.510	.471	1.181	.120

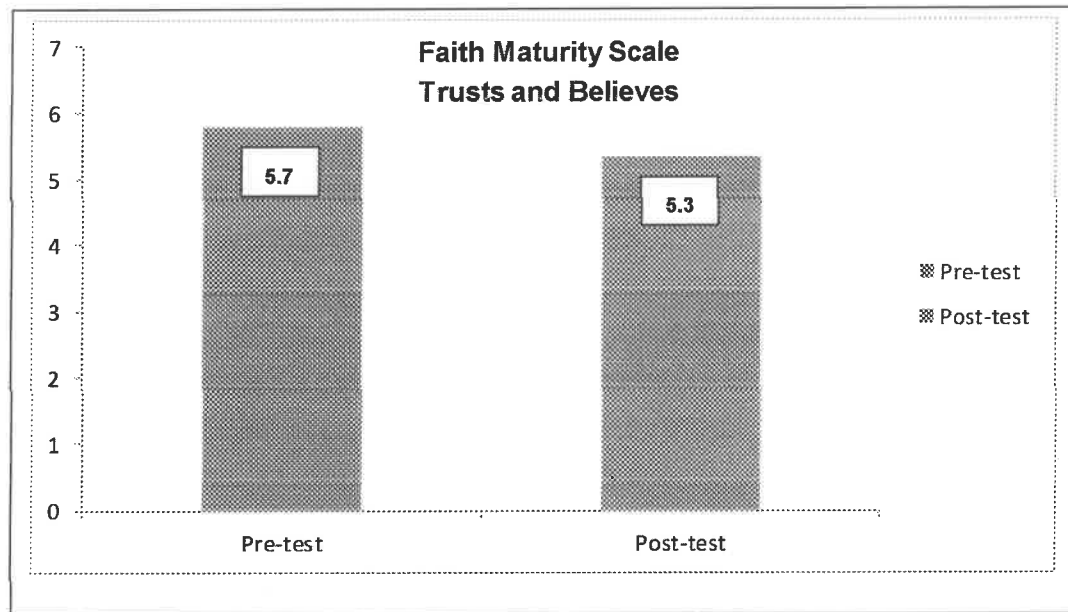
* $p < .10$ 

Table 3
Paired Samples T-test Summary on the Experiences the Fruits and Faith Scale of the FMS

	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	4.200	.846	4.906	.772	.706	.946	.007*

* $p < .10$

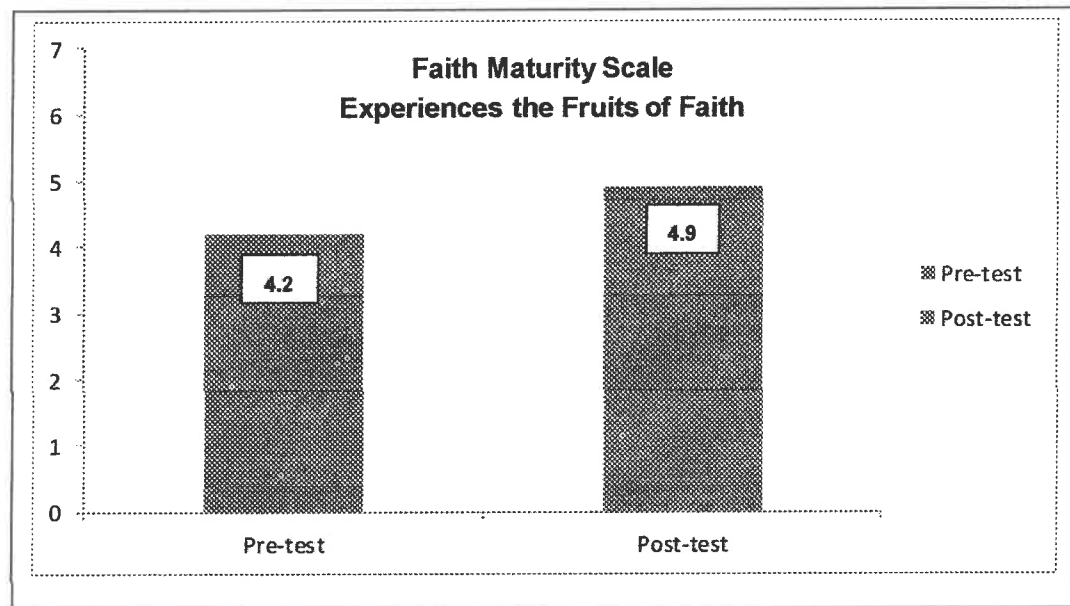


Table 4
Paired Samples T-test Summary on the Integrates Faith and Life Scale of the FMS

	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	5.941	.685	6.024	.696	.082	.308	.288

* $p < .10$

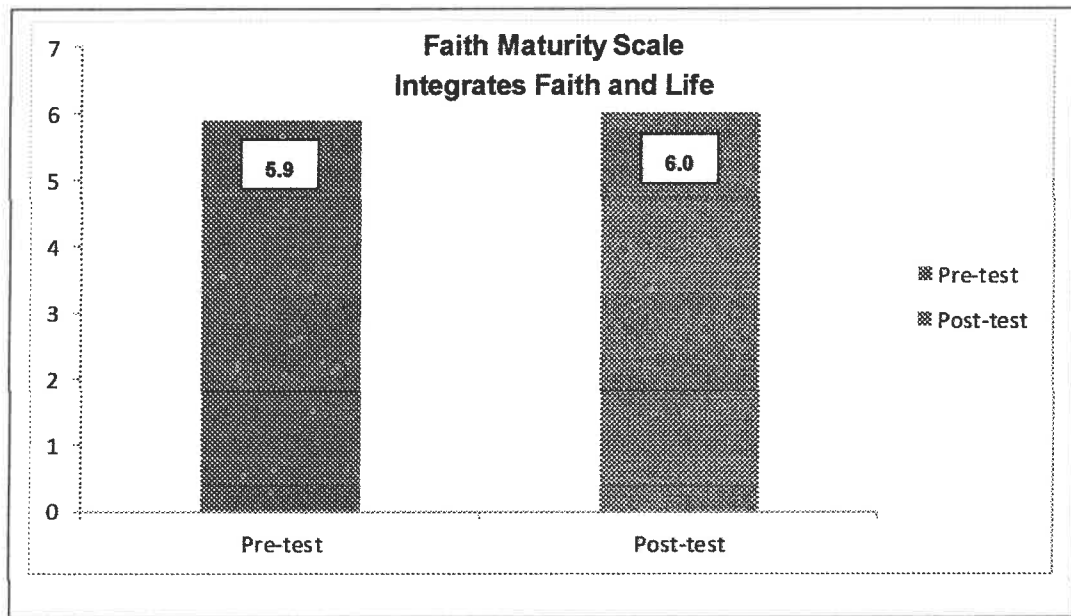


Table 5*Paired Samples T-test Summary on the Seeks Spiritual Growth Scale of the FMS*

	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	5.765	.877	5.941	.653	.176	.611	.251

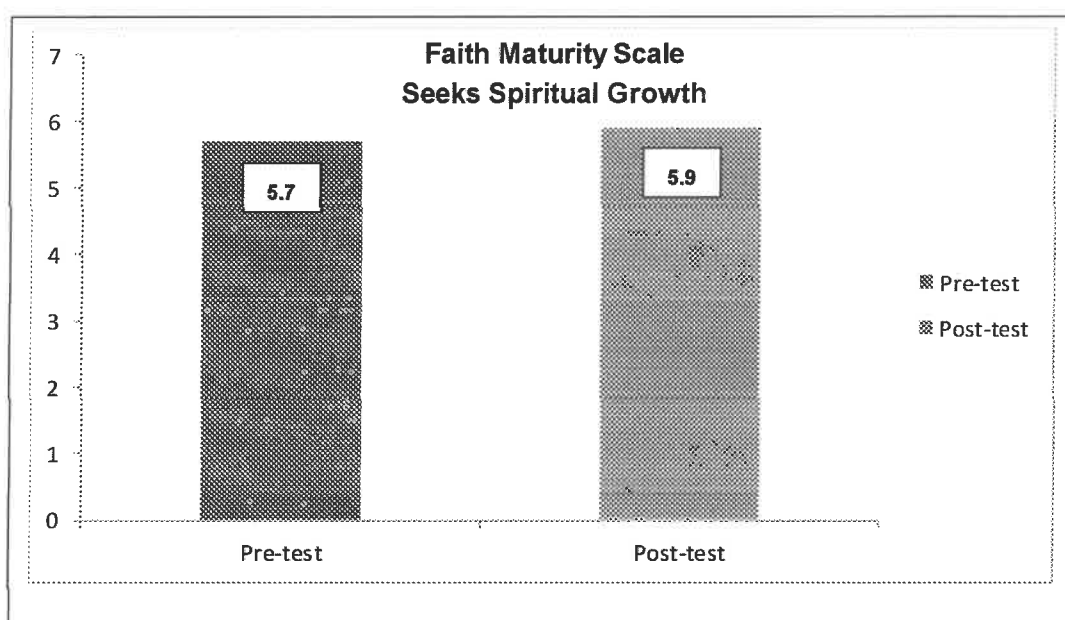
* $p < .10$ 

Table 6

Paired Samples T-test Summary on the Experiences and Nurtures Faith in Community Scale of the FMS

	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	5.824	.860	5.926	.784	.103	.531	.436

* $p < .10$

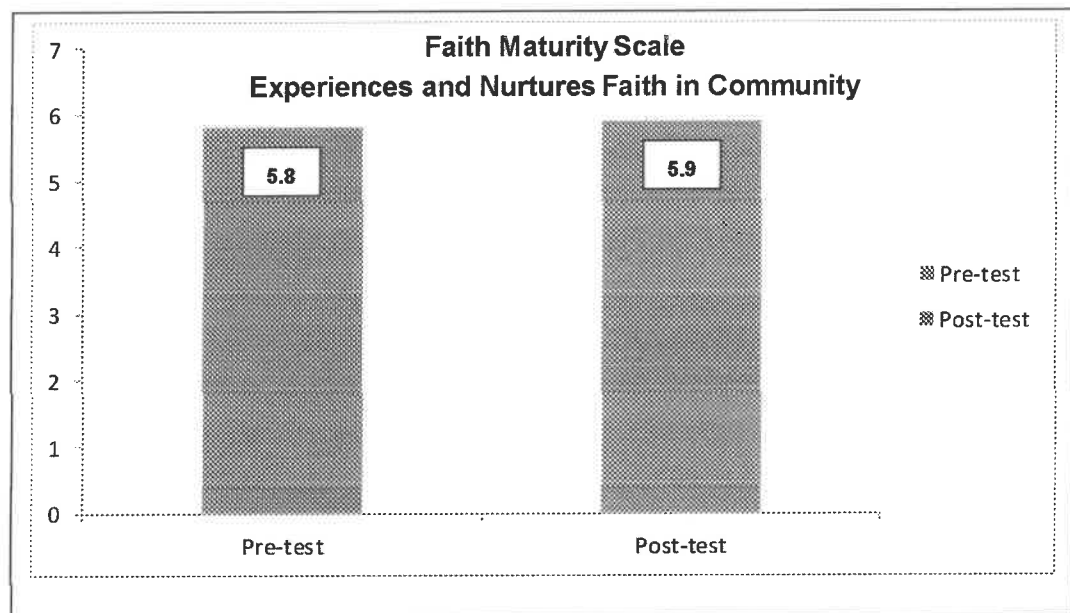
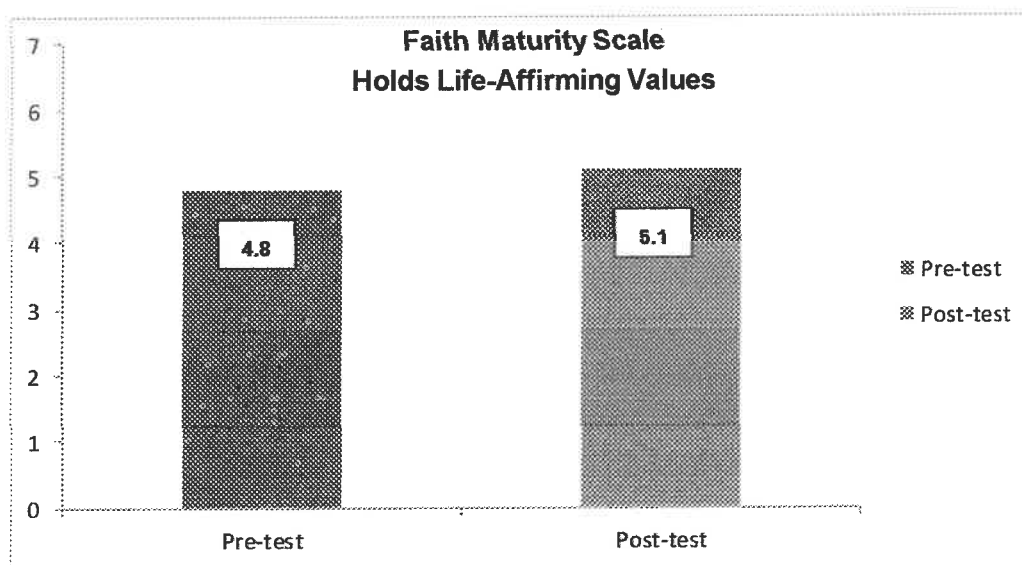


Table 8*Paired Samples T-test Summary on the Holds Life-Affirming Values Scale of the FMS*

	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	4.814	.759	5.157	.942	.343	.611	.034*

*p < .10



<i>Paired Samples T-test Summary on the Advocates Social Changes Scale of the FMS</i>							
	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	5.074	1.158	5.353	.956	.279	1.152	.332

* $p < .10$

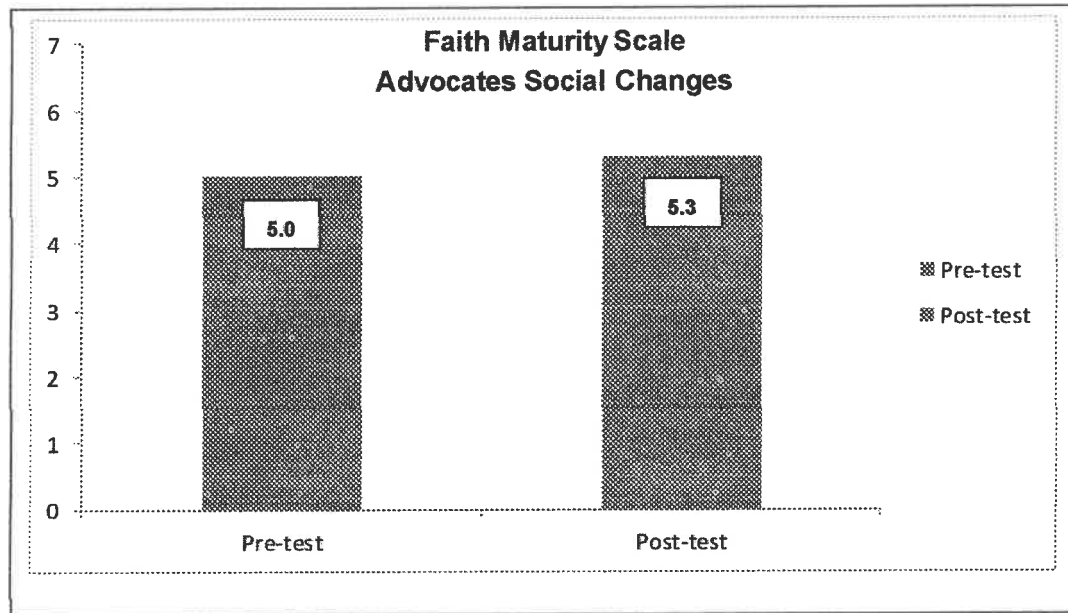
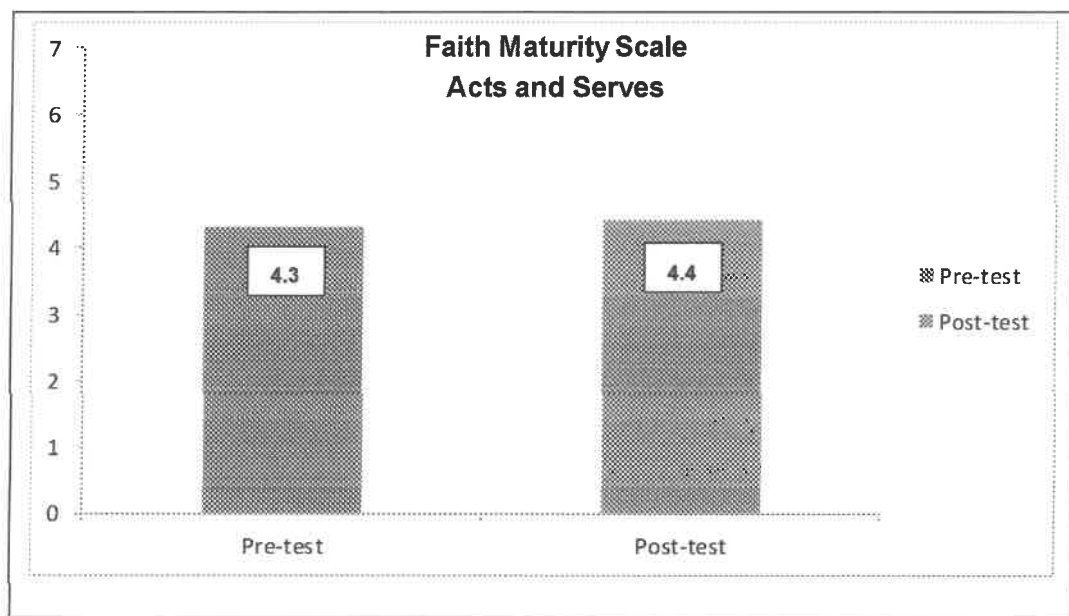


Table 9*Paired Samples T-test Summary on the Acts and Serves Scale of the FMS*

	Pre-test		Post-test		Difference		p-value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Church Leaders	4.306	1.164	4.435	1.295	.129	.561	.356

* $p < .10$ 

The writer began analyzing the data by looking at the aggregate of the data. What he discovered was that while there was a positive impact as a result of the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models. The gains reported were statistically insignificant. However, when the writer began to analyze the data on a domain by domain basis another pattern emerged. This writer first discovered that there was a slight decrease in the domain labeled “trusts and believes.” Those series of questions explored God’s transcendence and immanence, Jesus’ humanity and divinity, the reconciliation of God’s love and our suffering, the acceptance of God’s love as unconditional and whether they experience the direction of God in their daily lives. Again this domain revealed lower scores after the interventions employed. In fact, one member of the leadership team confessed that she was “wavering in her faith.” This will be explored in the next section of this document.

Nevertheless, the writer discovered that the other seven domains saw an increase in the median scores. The most significant increase, however, statistically and numerically was in the areas of “Experiences the fruits of faith”, which explored questions related to feelings of freedom, experiencing meaning and purpose in life, experiencing a sense of peace as well as a profound sense of personal security and self-acceptance.⁴ This is significant because according to Benson, Donahue and Erickson the “fruits of faith” is a “consequential dimension.”⁵ This dimension reveals the “kinds of behaviors and attitudes that flow from a dynamic faith that transforms life, perspective,

⁴*The Faith Maturity Scale*, 7.

⁵*Ibid.*, 4.

and priority, and are consistent with the theology found in most religious traditions.”⁶The other area of statistical significance for this writer is “holds life-affirming values.” This domain was concerned with the ways in which the participants pursued a healthy lifestyle, felt responsible for promoting human welfare, affirmed religious diversity, embraced gender and racial equality, accepted other people and affirmed the sanctity of creation.⁷ The data suggests attitudinal and priority changes in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith. However, the writer would have liked to have seen more statistical significance in the domains of “integrates faith and life”, “advocates social change”, and “acts and serves.” Those domains speak more to direct action rather than passive attitude. Again, the words of James rings true, “I will show you my faith by my works.”⁸

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Jas 2:18b, (ESV).

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the faith maturity of the servant leaders of the Mount Zion Baptist Church. Specifically, the objective was to determine the degree to which their attitudes, priorities, and commitments were consistent with a life affirming, vibrant faith. Secondly, the writer sought to foster the faith maturity of project participants. The writer hypothesized that after targeted Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models the participants would show an increase in the mean scores as reflected on the Faith Maturity Scale. The Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Model consisted of three mini sermon series on various aspects of faith. Also, a Bible study series was conducted entitled “IFaith”, which dealt with the writings of James and his understanding of faith. To supplement these two major undertakings, the leadership team was asked to practice the spiritual disciplines of scripture reading, prayer and meditation as well as read the book “Crazy Faith.”

Following the implementation of the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models, the post assessment was given to the same group of servant leaders. In analyzing the data from the pre and post assessment revealed that there was no statistically significant change. This suggests no global attitudinal changes. However, the data suggested that there was a positive impact made, as the aggregate scores were slightly higher on the post assessment. The data was then analyzed focusing on each of the eight core dimensions

individually. This analysis revealed statistical significance in two primary areas: (1) Experiences the fruits of faith and (2) Holds life-affirming values.

The limited sample size is a possible factor in the statistical significance however, this writer feels that it adequately captured the attitudes, priorities and commitments of the targeted context. While, the interventions based on the post assessment showed some attitudinal shifts the lack of global change and statistical significance offers opportunity for greater reflection on the factors that may have impacted the results of the project.

This writer reflected on the effectiveness of the Multi-Dimensional Faith Formation Models and their impact on the participants in this project recognizes the limitations of generalized interventions. This is to suggest that there may have been global attitudinal changes if the interventions were more specific to the findings of the pre-assessment. For instance, if it were discovered that an area of deficiency was in the domain of acts and serves, then perhaps the writer could have employed a service learning intervention to address that specific domain. This approach was not considered at the time of this project. Another area where this model could be improved is in the length of time in which the interventions are employed. This model of implementation could be improved in the future by implementing the program at the beginning of a leadership cycle rather than at the end of the cycle as this project was conducted. Finally, this project could benefit from a larger sample size. The limited sample size prevents this writer from generalizing his findings.

The writer, however, feels confident that participants have a better understanding of Biblical faith and what is required of those who profess to be believers. They, along with the writer discovered three biblical aspects of faith. They are the relational aspect of

faith, the intentional aspect of faith and the transformational aspect of faith. Together we also discovered that there are a variety of faith experiences. Namely, we discovered there are three basic ways in which faith is discussed and applied—the theological, the philosophical and the biblical. Ultimately, we came to understand as a group of servant leaders that the church must go beyond mere professions of faith toward the embodiment of concrete practices of faith.

This is the insight of James Davidson in his important work, which looked at *Belief as an Independent Variable*. In that study looking at the phenomena of belief, he identified the similar domains of vertical and horizontal belief. In making that distinction he made several observations this writer feels are relevant to this ministry project. Davidson's work also provided further support for the conceptual framework for this ministry project. Davidson in reflecting on his finding reported "First, religion tends to have personal consequences for those church members who maintain vertical beliefs."¹ Secondly, he reported, "religion tends to have social consequences for church members who adhere to beliefs about loving one's neighbor and doing good for others."² He further revealed that his study researched showed that those "who are most likely to be active in social issues are those who believe such activity is a legitimate dimension of their religious commitment."³ Finally, his research revealed, "while vertical beliefs were positively associated with comfort and horizontal beliefs were positively related to social action, the association between vertical beliefs and comfort was greater than the

¹James Davidson. "Belief as an Independent Variable," Abstract, Journal For the Scientific Study of Religion vol. 11 no. 1 (March 1972): 73.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

association between horizontal beliefs and social action.” This final insight led him to conclude that churches provide “relatively few ways by which church members can translate their horizontal beliefs into social action.”⁴

While it is important to note that Davidson is reporting his findings on belief. This writer holds the position that belief and faith are interchangeable. Therefore, this writer recognizes that the same could be said for faith maturity. However, Davidson’s insights are consistent with what this writer discovered during the implementation of this ministry project. The most significant insight for this writer was the understanding of the impact that he had on the faith maturity process.

The writer was reminded through this process of the importance of his role as example and spiritual leader within the community of faith. He better understands that the principles that were preached about, taught, and discussed are often caught more than they are taught. Therefore, the writer realizes the need to model the biblical understanding of faith in words and works. The writer recognizes as a result of this project, the imperative that he embody a vibrant faith that is reflected in his ministry, serving and preaching.

In reflecting on this ministry project, the writer identified two primary areas for future ministry implementation. The first area is in the development of seminars directly related to the aspects of faith. This area would afford the writer the opportunity to share his findings as they relate to a biblical model of faith. The second area of possible implementation is in seminars and workshops that address the “variety of faith expressions.” These seminars or workshops would look at the ways in which faith is expressed or understood biblically, theologically, and philosophically.

⁴Ibid.

The writer also recognizes in this area additional research opportunities. In addition, to the above potential plans of implementation, the writer has reflected on three other ways of dissemination of these principles.

First, the writer plans to create a curriculum and design teaching plans based on these principles. He envisions that these curriculum and teaching plans could be taught in Bible Study or be offered as an elective in our current offering of Discipleship Class studies at Mount Zion Baptist Church.

Second, the principles could be marketed to other churches and faith communities. This would prove invaluable for pastors, leaders, and churches who are interested in sharing this information with members of their churches. The principles could be communicated through seminars, workshops or as a bible study.

Third is the possibility that these principles could be developed into a book designed for those beyond the academy. The purpose would be to make available to those beyond the academy and the church walls another way of discussing and understanding faith. It would consist of chapters dealing with the *Variety of Faith Expressions---* Biblical, theological, and philosophical. In addition, it would have chapters directly dealing with the *Aspects of Biblical Faith*. Chapter would include those concerned with the relational, intentional, and transformational aspects of Biblical faith.

Finally, in subsequent implementation of this project and given the results of the data, this writer postulates that of the interventions utilized the practice of spiritual discipline had the greatest impact.

In conclusion, the writer believes that we all have been given a measure of faith. He further believes that the church has the responsibility to provide members with the

opportunity to measure and mature their faith. This writer has discovered throughout this ministry project that both are possible. This document is a record of that discovery and a testament to the fact that there is a Historical, Biblical and Theological underpinning to both faith and the maturing of faith. As Spiritual Leader, this is the primary task to which this writer has been called. As Paul articulated in his letter to the church in Ephesus, “And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”⁵ This writer understands that this process of equipping and edifying requires intentional leadership. This is leadership committed to the task of seeing persons reach their fullest potential in Christ and to experience fullness of life. It is the leader’s task to articulate a vision of what people can be and become. This is what Dr. Terry Thomas meant when he suggested:

The movement of people to new things, new adventures, new possibilities, new heights, wider width and deeper depth will not get underway until the people are confronted with a vision. No one who is called into leadership is called to keep those to whom they have been called to lead exactly where they are. There is the idea of taking people to much higher and more in-depth experience than they have previously experienced. When people are not involved in the experience of discovering something new, things will begin to decline.⁶

This writer sought to articulate a vision of what the congregation could do and the witness it could present to the world.

⁵ Eph 4:11-13 (NKJV).

⁶ Terry Thomas, “*The Possession of a Vision*” (Lecture, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, August 2010), 4.

AFTERTHOUGHT

A month after the completion of this ministry project, the Servant Leaders of MZBC sponsored a back to school supply drive, called Fill the Box. The pastor made the recommendation at the July Servant Leaders meeting and the leadership team embraced the project. They were instrumental in making up the flyers and decorating the boxes to be donated. The pastor brought a sampling of supplies being requested. The leadership did not disappoint. They were the first to bring in the necessary supplies and the church followed their example. This writer was both excited and proud. Weekly the donations grew and threatened to outgrow the area we had designated for their collection. We ended up donating a tub full of paper and several boxes full of pens, pencils, scissors, and other needed supplies to a Title One school in the area.

APPENDIX A
COVENANTAL AGREEMENT



COVENANTAL AGREEMENT

“And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.” Colossians 3:14

We, the members of the MZBC SERVANT LEADERSHIP TEAM covenant with one another:

1. To EXERCISE faithful stewardship over our time and talents.
2. To fully PARTICIPATE in this ministry project.
3. To commit to PARTICIPATE for the span of three months.
4. To STRICTLY ADHERE to the rules of confidentiality at all times.
5. To ENDEAVOR to support one another throughout this project.
6. To be inclusive and to ENCOURAGE open discussion.
7. To RESPECT the opinion of others.
8. To SUPPORT the pastor and be committed individually and corporately to the completion of this ministry project.
9. To PRAY for the pastor and the other members of the MZBC Servant Leadership Team.

I, acknowledge by my signature that I willfully and voluntarily entered into this covenant.
I acknowledge this reality by me signature to that effect below.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
FAITH MATURITY INDEX

FAITH MATURITY INDEX

Please answer the following questions using the Likert Scale below.

1=Never True, 2=Rarely True, 3=True once in a while, 4=Sometimes true, 5=Often true, 6=Almost true, 7=Always true

- 1) I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor. _____
- 2) I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again. _____
- 3) My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day. _____
- 4) I help others with their religious questions and struggles. _____
- 5) I tend to be critical of other people. ® _____
- 6) In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs. _____
- 7) My faith helps me know right from wrong. _____
- 8) I do things to help protect the environment. _____
- 9) I devote time to reading and studying the Bible. _____
- 10) I have a hard time accepting myself. ® _____
- 11) Every day I see evidence that God is active in the world. _____
- 12) I take excellent care of my physical health. _____
- 13) I am active in efforts to promote social justice. _____
- 14) I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually. _____
- 15) I take time for periods of prayer or meditation. _____
- 16) I am active in efforts to promote world peace. _____

- 17) I accept people whose religious beliefs are different from mine. _____
- 18) I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world. _____
- 19) As I grow older, my understanding of God changes. _____
- 20) I feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities and obligations I have. _____
- 21) I give significant portions of my time and money to help other people. _____
- 22) I speak out for equality for women and minorities. _____
- 23) I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people. _____
- 24) My life is filled with meaning and purpose. _____
- 25) I do not understand how a loving God can allow so much pain and suffering in the world. ® _____
- 26) I believe that I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved.
® _____
- 27) I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis no matter how serious. _____
- 28) I care a great deal about reducing poverty in the United States and throughout the world. _____
- 29) I try to apply my faith to political and social issues. _____
- 30) My life is committed to Jesus Christ. _____
- 31) I talk with other people about my faith. _____
- 32) My life is filled with stress and anxiety. _____
- 33) I go out of my way to show love to people I meet. _____
- 34) I have a real sense that God is guiding me. _____

35) I do not want the churches of this nation getting involved in political issues ®

36) I like to worship and pray with others. _____

37) I think Christians must be about the business of creating international
understanding and harmony. _____

38) I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God's creation. _____¹

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APPENDIX C
SERMON SAMPLES

SAMPLE SERMON #1

NOW FAITH IS...

¹ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ² For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. NKJV

In his New York Bestselling book, *Mentor Leader*, Tony Dungy tells the story of Mean Joe Greene who is arguably one of the greatest defensive tackles to ever play professional football. He was the anchor of what became known as the “steel Curtain” defense that led the Pittsburgh Steelers to several World Championships in the 1970’s. Mean Joe Green wanted nothing more than to be successful and to be a part of a successful organization. However, when he was drafted in the late 60’s the Pittsburgh Steelers were not a successful organization. And as a result Joe Green became frustrated and almost quit before he experienced the success that he so desperately wanted. He hoped that things would get better but he had lost faith in the organization, the team and his coaches.

What I have discovered is that this is a human condition. Too many of us are like Joe Green. At the first sign of trouble, when it seems we cannot win. When it seems things won’t work out in our favor. When it seems like it won’t turn around. Far too many of us are ready to give up. We are ready to throw in the towel. Ready to pull up our stakes and move on. And the reason some of us never reach our fullest potential is because when times got tough, when it wasn’t working. When it seemed darkest we walked away too soon. And I have come to submit today that if 2011 is going to be

bigger, better and bolder than 2010 then we have to learn to stay in there...stay the course and stick it out. But I need to push us further, the same reality is often true of the household of faith, the very minute we encounter a little difficulty. The moment we experience a setback we walk away. We give up. We throw in the towel and pull up our stakes and as a result never experience all that we can in God through Christ.

This is the problem which the writer of Hebrews is seeking to address. This community of believers was undergoing severe persecution. As a result of this ongoing and increasing persecution, members of this community were walking away from the faith. And as a result were tempted to cast aside any identification with Jesus Christ. This is revealed in Chapter 10 in the 23rd verse to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” And again around the 32nd verse, where the community is exhorted to not “throw aside or cast away their confidence.” He says in that 32nd verse, recall or remember the former days in which after you received the light, you endured a great struggle with sufferings. He says you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations and became companions of those who were so treated. He said you even had compassion on me in my chains. He says basically now is not time to cast away your confidence because after you have endured then you will receive the promise. And then in verse 37, he offers them a word of hope, he says “for yet a little while and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. And then he offers them words of exhortation, which harkens back to the prophetic voice of Habakkuk, “now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, I will not be pleased with him.” And then look at the words of encouragement, he says “but we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who believe and are saved.

It is with those words that we transition into our text for teaching this morning. So often we have looked at these familiar words as defining faith but I have come to submit that rather than defining faith it really describes the nature and character of faith. He says “now faith is the substance” Your Bible might say now faith is being sure of what you hope for. It might say now faith is the assurance of or if you are reading from a more contemporary version it might render that verse now faith is the reality of what is hoped for. This writer understands that despite what we are going through faith should be embraced as a present reality. That in the face of the uncertainty we face we can face it all with face. And while this year is looking a lot like last year, the promise of this text is that we can face it with a renewed sense in God. That is why Andrea Crouch can sing “through it all, through it all...I’ve learned to trust in Jesus, and I have learned to trust in God.

In other words, **FAITH IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR CONFIDENCE.** In fact that word the KJV renders as “substance” (somebody say “Substance”, means confidence, assurance. It literally means that which stands under something or gives it support. It is the picture of a person standing under something to hold it up. It is the image of the foundation of a building or a house, that which gives it structure or support. It was used in legalese to communicate the notion of the guarantee behind a business contract. Moulton and Miligan made the picture clearer by describing it to a “title deed”, which guaranteed a future possession to the one who held the title deed. In a real sense Faith is the foundation on which we build our hope. That is what Eugene Peterson understands he says, “the fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living.” The question we

have to ask of the task is what are the things hoped for? The text provides us a clue in the word translated “hoped for!” This word carries the meaning of someone having a fully confident expectation and anticipation of deliverance. In other words, our confidence, our assurance, our reality is rooted in expectancy. The expectancy that are future fulfillment is perceived as a present reality. The expectancy that no matter what it looks like your faith is in God. Not the stock market. Not your 401k. Not the job market. But your faith is in God and you expect God to do something about your situation, about your circumstance and you expect it right now.

So not only is **FAITH THE FOUNDATION OF OUR CONFIDENCE BUT FAITH IS ALSO THE FULFILMENT OF OUR CONVICTION.**

First, note that this writer wants us to understand that this is not merely and exclusively an eschatological or end time reality. This is not just about the hereafter. But he wants us to know that it is also about the here and the now. He wants us to know that we can have this confidence, this assurance in this life. This idea is captured in the words “hope” and “evidence.” He says **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.”** That word “evidence” is only used once in the Bible and it is in this verse. It means to convict or convince. And as such carries a negative and a positive connotation. In a negative sense, it paints the image of a lawyer who brings forth evidence that is indisputable and undeniable and as a result of the evidence presented the offender is exposed and convicted. Positively, It is the image of a lawyer who has worked to convince people of a new way of thinking or a new way of seeing things. it signifies a process of proof or demonstration. It is the picture of someone demonstrating a product in order to convince you of the merit of that particular product. Let me illustrate

it this way. Does anybody remember the traveling vacuum cleaner salesperson. When I was young it seemed like they would come every summer to sell you a vacuum cleaner. And they weren't satisfied to just show you the cleaner and talk to you about its features. They would demonstrate by vacuuming your floor for you. And that is how God is, and through Jesus Christ that is what he showed us. Through Christ he showed us that he loved us. Through Christ He showed he cared about us. Through Christ he showed he desired relationship with us. Through Christ he proved he was able to heal us. Through Christ he showed he was able to deliver us. Through Christ he demonstrated his unconditional love for us. John 3:16, for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believed in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrated His love for us in this way, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 2 Corinthians 5: 18-19 communicates the same idea in this way "that God was reconciling us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. He says God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

And so what this writer is trying to communicate to this beleaguered and bewildered community is it might not look good right now but in light of what God has done in and through Christ, he wants them to know that they can live their lives positively and optimistically because the God they serve is faithful. He wants them to embrace the inward conviction from God that what He has promised He will perform. It is the conviction that God will keep His word. And the same goes for us, we may not face persecution but we know something about problems. We might not face the lions

but we know something about facing liars. We know what it feels like to be denied, detoured. We know what it feels like to have things not work in your favor and people work against you. Even when it looks like it is not working in your favor. Faith has the power to see and realize what others cannot see. And the good news is that we have God's favor and what this writer wants us to know is that while we might not see it now we can put our faith in a God that has been faithful. And if God has done it before we have confidence because we know he can and will do it again. And so no matter what it looks like, I don't run. I don't hide. I don't worry. Because the God I serve is faithful. The God I serve would not bring me this far to leave me. The God we serve is able. He's able to do what no other power can do. He's able to make a way out of no way. He is able to fix it right now.

**FAITH IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR CONFIDENCE IN HOPE, IT IS
THE FOUNDATION OF OUR CONVICTION OF HOPE BUT IT IS ALSO
THE FOUNDATION OF OUR WITNESS TO HOPE.**

He says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders received or obtained a good testimony. That word for testimony is our word for Martyr. It is the portrait of someone who will die for what they believe. It literally means to witness or bear witness but it also means to be of good report. To have a good testimony. So on one hand, It is implied that God testifies or bears witness to their exercise of faith, that is why in Chapter 12:1 he says "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lets us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." He says these folk, their lives bear witness through faith in a God

who is faithful. These were a folk who trusted in God. Folk who waited on Him. Folk who faced the trials because they knew they weren't facing them alone. But this word "evidence" also implies that our faith will bear witness to what we truly believe.

And as Eugene Peterson communicates that the mere "act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors and set them above the crowd." By that he is suggesting, we can no longer just profess our faith, we must practice our faith. We must come to the understanding that yes our faith has a horizontal dimension but it also has a vertical dimension. This is what James meant in James 2 when he argues, "what does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works. Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things, which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead." And as believers our professions are only as good as our practice. So on one hand we can't profess that we trust God in all situations and fall apart the many things don't work out for us. We can't honestly profess that God is the head of our lives and we won't go where he tells us to go or do what he wants you to do. On the other hand, we can't profess to have faith and we aren't partnering with God in this world to provide ministry to those who Jesus called to "least among us." We have an immature faith and underdeveloped faith, where we are not willing to be the manifested presence of God in this world. To risk prestige and privilege to befriend those who are friendless. Our faith must spur us to love those that go unloved. To care for those no one else cares about. To help those no one else wants to help. And that is why he said back in chapter 10, the "righteous are to live by faith." And as we will study in the coming weeks, it was these

acts of faith for which the elders were distinguished. But it will also bear witness to whom we believe in. You can always tell what folk really believe when times get hard. But can I help somebody that is the time that our faith should be strongest. Too often we want to wait until after the storm is over. But the truth of this text is that we have to learn to trust God in the midst of the storm. Isn't that what David discovered. Is not that what Meshach, shadrach and abendego discovered. (God uses struggle and trouble to make us stronger (Scientist and Butterflies)).

And then the writer transitions us from how faith functions in our lives and where our faith should be focused to how our faith is formed in our lives. And in doing so reminds us that **FAITH IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR CONFESSION OF HOPE.**

Look at what he says in verse 3, "by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." That word is the RHEMA word. It is literally the spoken word of God. And ultimately reminds us all that God still speaks into our situations and our circumstances. You do know that it was God's RHEMA word that spoke this world and everything in it into existence. The RHEMA word of God where he said let there be! And what had previously not existed now existed. What wasn't there before was not there. So much so that we declare that God created ex nihilo or from nothing. And that is good news from somebody, because that is how you feel right now like you have nothing. Nothing to hope for. Nothing to believe in. Nothing to live for but I believe God sent you here today because he wants you to know that if I can create all that you see is 6

days, certainly I can turn your situation around. If I did it then. You need to know that I can do it again. In fact that is a lesson for all of us...if God did it before...

But not only is he reminding us of the power of God's RHEMA word but he is also reassuring us of the power of God's RHEMA word in our lives. This writer understands that this community's faith was waning. He realized that they needed their faith bolstered. And what he understood was that they needed to look no further than the word of God. That is why Paul said in Roman, that faith comes by hearing, hearing the word of God. Beloved there is no way around this truth that if you want to strengthen and fortify your faith, you have to spend time in the word of God because as this writer knows when God says it that settles it. Smith Wigglesworth known as the apostle of faith said the "word of God is to be received and obeyed. He goes so far to say "if a thing is in the Bible, it is so." He said you don't even have to pray about it just receive it and act upon it because God said so. And so I encourage all of us this year to commit ourselves to developing our faith through the word of God. And as James said in chapter 1:22 "to not only be a doer of the word, but also a hearer of the word." And I have come to declare that it really is that simple. God speaks, we hear and trust His word and then we act on His word. No matter what the circumstances or what the consequences may be. It may seem impossible. It may not make sense. It may be frightening. But if God said it that settles it. That is what that anonymous writer understood when he penned the words of that great hymn of the church, "How firm a foundation, ye servants of the Lord is laid for your faith in His excellent word."

The Bible says that you are a royal priesthood a holy nation. The Bible says you are an heir to the promise. The Bible says you are a child of God. That you are the head

and not the tale. The Bible says you would be blessed in the city and in the country. The Bible says he would keep you going out and coming in. The Bible says that He would never leave you or forsake you. The Bible says if you bring the tithe he would open up the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing you wouldn't be able to receive. He said weeping may endure for a night but joy will come in the morning. He said I will prepare tables before you in the presence of your enemies. The Bible says that by His stripes you are healed. The Bible says that if my people who are called by my name would humble themselves, pray and seek my face, then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sins and heal their land.

SAMPLE SERMON #2

LIVING A LIFE PLEASING TO GOD!

⁵By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. NKJV (Hebrews 11:5-6)

In this 5th and 6th verse of the 11th chapter of Hebrews, The preacher seeks to bolster his claim about faith that it was foundation of their confidence, convictions and confessions, that it was faith that was the structure the very essence of their communal lives, that God had indeed honored the faith of their ancestors and that as a result they could stand the test and trials of their lives because of the promises and power found in the word of God. And then in this 5th verse he introduces us to the Old Testament character of Enoch. We know very little about Enoch. Genesis provides us all but the briefest of biographical sketches found in Genesis 5. In fact what we know could be placed on an index card. We know that his father's name was Jared. We know from the Biblical record that he lived 65 years and begot Methuselah. And after he begot Methuselah Genesis records that he walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters so that his days were three hundred and sixty five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. The totality of his life summed up in a paragraph. One would have to go to the Jewish tradition to find extra-biblical writings about the life and exploits of Enoch. It is in the Jewish tradition that he is pictured as a model of righteousness. Also in the Jewish tradition he is revered as a model of repentance. In our text, it seems that the writer has decided to forgo those traditional overtures to the life of Enoch as he recasts him as a man of faith. Perhaps he

is drawing our attention back to Hebrews 10:38 where we are reminded in the words of Habakkuk that the just or the righteous shall live by faith. We cannot be certain but what we are certain of is that this writer has described what Faith is, reminded us that the elders obtained a good report because of their faith. And then in verse 5 says, by faith Enoch..." Immediately, the text suggests that Enoch is to be understood not in light of the prevailing Jewish traditional thought but he is to be understood as a model of faith. And the text says that it was by faith that Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found because God had taken him." For before he was taken he had this testimony, that "HE PLEASED GOD." And what this preacher wants his congregation to understand by using the life of Enoch is how they too through faith can please God. And that is the lesson for us to discover this morning. **How does one live a life pleasing to GOD?**

Well the first thing the writer reminds us of this morning is that if you want to please God you have to have faith in Him. He says "without faith it is impossible to please God." Without a proper Biblical understanding of what Faith is impossible to please God. This text challenges us to embrace a Biblical understanding of faith. Because what I have discovered is that where many folk miss the mark is when we make faith the object of itself. Where we begin to say things like if I have enough faith but what we are really saying is if I have enough faith in myself, in my abilities. If I have enough confidence in my talents and in my acumen that I can turn this situation around. I can make this circumstance better. If I have enough faith I can make things better. And we all know folk like that and if you talk to them long enough you discover that what they are putting their faith in is in themselves. And the danger of that is that we begin to

teeter on a dangerous humanism where we leave God out of the equation and rely on ourselves. But let me caution you what a wise person once said, “lean not to your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge Him and let Him direct your path. They said do not be wise in your own eyes...” Not only does a proper Biblical understanding of faith take the focus off of us but also off our stuff and our status. we need to take the focus off our stuff. Off of our trophies. Off of our accolades, accomplishments and achievements. Because the danger is as we discussed last week that we put our faith in that stuff, in those persons, in those institutions only to find out that they are transit and temporary.

But a proper Biblical understanding of faith realizes and recognizes that the source and the focus of our Faith should be God. It is in God that we should put our hope, trust and confidence. This writer says that is what Enoch did and your Bible may say because of his faith in God, he was translated, transferred or transported. It literally means that he “changed positions” and did not see death. In other words, because of his faith in God Enoch did not experience death. Can I make that plainer, what should have happened didn’t happen. And the text suggests that because of your reliance on Him there are some things that should be that won’t be.

And I might as well stop there and pause for the cause and ask the question, what have you not seen because of your faith in God? Because you put your faith in God, what have you not experienced? And you don’t have to tell folk your business but I believe because someone has put their faith in God they have not experienced a foreclosure. Have not experienced bankruptcy. Have not experienced a repossession. Have not experienced Divorce. Somebody knows what I am talking about because you

put your faith in God and have not missed a meal. You put your trust in God and have not had a nervous breakdown, an anxiety attack. Is anybody feeling me yet? You put your faith in God and he worked it out somehow. You put your faith in God and you don't understand it all but your loan was approved. You put your faith in God and not sure where it went but the depression lifted. The despair washed away. The disappointment didn't sting so much. You had the unmitigated gall and audacity to trust God when it looked like it was over. It looked like it was done with. They said it was over but you trusted in God and so today like Enoch you have a testimony that God is good. You have a testimony that God is able. You have a testimony that God might not come when you want Him to but he is always right on time. Somebody knows we serve and on time God. Who am I talking too? You needed a healing...on time. Needed deliverance...on time! Needed a breakthrough...on time! Needed salvation...on time! Needed a miracle...on time! Needed God to turn it around...on time! Needed Him to make it right...on time! Needed a friend that sticks closer than any brother...**somebody shout ON TIME!** The first lesson of this text is If we are going to live a life pleasing to God, **we must put our faith in God. It is a life lived in reliance on Him. And this text suggests that when we do there are some things we won't experience.**

And then look at what he says, "for he who comes to God must believe that He is..." Can we unpack that for a moment. First we have to pay special attention to construction, he who comes to God. The reason that is important is because the rendering in our text does not capture the full meaning of that construction. In its literal sense the construction based on the Greek has to do with first and foremost---walking intimately with God. In other words, what this preacher is describing is someone who is

walking with God in every facet of their lives. These are not just C.M.E or Sunday Christians. These are believers who walk with God every day, all day. And what this writer is pointing us toward is that if we want to please God not only do we have to live in reliance on Him but we have to be in relationship with him. Since I met Monique there hasn't been a day, we haven't in some way shared together. Imagine being in a relationship with someone and you only talked to them occasionally or when you felt like it. Pretty soon this relationship would dissolve because of neglect and inattentiveness. Well the same thing is true of our relationship with God. And if we are going to live this Christian life with integrity we have to maintain our relationship with God. But what happens, we get tired. We stop praying. We stop our devotions. We stop communing with God. And we lose the sense of intimacy with God. But what I love about God is that even when we walk away from Him, he is still waiting for us. Is not that the lesson of the prodigal son. Walked away from the Father and squandered all that he gave to him. But the story doesn't end there because the parable says that he came to himself and returned to the father and the Father who saw him from a far ran out to meet him and embrace him. And the lesson behind that story was that God is the same way with us. And I am so thankful that when I wandered away. When I went astray. When I squandered his blessings, trampled on His grace, made a mockery of his mercy. I am so glad that when I came to my senses that he met me where I was and his love lifted me, his mercy met me, his grace gravitated toward me and his peace kept my heart and my mind. And I don't want to be selfish this morning because I know I am not the only somebody who walked away from God but if you are here aren't you glad this morning, doesn't your heart rejoice that we serve a God like that. A God of second, third and

fourth chances. A God that looks beyond our faults and sees and meets our needs.

Anybody else glad about a love that would not let you go. A grace that is amazing. A mercy that is marvelous.

Living a life pleasing to God is a life that is spent in relationship with Him but that construction has a double meaning because the construction is also used to describe someone who passionately petitions God to form a specific Act. This is not a casual, token prayer that one might offer before the go to sleep at night or some quick cursory prayer as we rush about our day. This is the portrait of someone who prays continually and without ceasing. This is a prayer of urgency. This is the prayer of a person who needs God to move in their situation and they need him to move right now. This is the prayer of the person who in their hearts knows that if they ever needed the Lord before they sure do need him now. This is the prayer of the person who needs God to do what no other power can do. And so if we read the text from that vantage point we hear this, “without faith it is impossible to please God because the one that prays passionately, and urgently to God must believe that He is...

Don't miss that this preacher infers that you won't “**come**” to God, in intimate relationship or fervent prayer if you don't believe He is real. That is important. I am beginning to believe that many don't believe that God is real and so much of what they do in terms of their religious practice is done out of obligation and amounts to nothing more than form or fashion. But where are the folk who know that God is real? And you know he is real because he walks with you and talks with you and tells you you belong to me. Where are the folk that know that God is real because you called on Him in the midnight hour and he dried your tears. He banished your fears. He eased your pains.

This preacher says you can't please God if you don't believe He exists. No matter what you are going through, God is. No matter how it feels or what it looks like...God is real. No matter how much it hurts...God is real!

There was a story circulating on the internet this week about a conversation that took place between a barber and his customer. They talked about a number of topics and subjects. And as is the case they eventually turned their focus to the subject of God. The barber said, I do not believe that God exists. The customer said why do you say that, to which the Barber replied, you just have to look in the streets to realize that God does not exist. He said if God existed, why are there so many sick people, so many abandoned children. If God exists, why is their suffering and pain in the world. He said I can't imagine a loving God that would allow such things. The customer thought about it but did not respond. Eventually the Barber finished and the customer left the shop. As he left the shop, he encountered a young homeless man, with stringy, dirty hair and an untrimmed beard. He looked dirty and unkempt. The customer immediately returned to the shop and announced to the barber, I don't believe that Barbers exist. The surprised Barber asked him after their encounter how he could say that, after all he had just cut his hair. The customer said there is no way that barbers could exist because if they did exist there would be no people with dirty long hair and untrimmed beards like that man outside. The barber was now incredulous and said, I got you because barbers do exist, that is what happens when people do not come to me." The customer said "exactly, that is the point and GOD does exist, and the reason there is so much suffering and pain in the world is because people do not go to him and look to Him for help."

And I have come to declare this morning that you are looking at a living testimony to the truth of that story. I know that God is real because only God could have changed me. Only God could have regulated this mind. Only God could have softened this heart but thanks be to God that He showed himself real in my life. But I am not the only somebody who knows God is real. Where are the folk who can affirm like we used to sing at Providence, “there are some things I may not know and there are some places I might not Go but I am sure of this one thing, that God is real for I can feel him deep within.” And then my Aunt Helen would say, OH Yes God is real, he’s real in my soul, yes God is real for He has washed and made me whole. His love for me is like pure Gold, Yes God is real for I can feel him in my soul. And then my Aunts would say “some folk may doubt, some folk may scorn, all can desert and leave me alone BUT AS FOR ME, I’ll take God’s part, For God is real and I can feel him in my heart. And then we would sing my favorite verse, “I cannot tell just how you felt when Jesus took your since away, but since that day, YES SINCE that HOUR, God has been real for I can feel His holy power.” And that is the testimony of one who has walked with God and petitioned God. And have discovered that Indeed God is real. And that is why we can never discount some ones testimony. We can’t discredit their praise. We can’t dismiss their tears because for some body God is real. And we don’t know what they have been through, what they have overcome, what that have been tempted and tried by but one thing we do know is that their praise suggests that God is real. Anybody got just a few minutes to give God some praise because you know that what you been through and came through it was nobody but God. When you were in trouble He came to your

rescue. When you were sick He healed you. When you were lonely he visited you. If we are going to live a life pleasing to God we have to know that He is real.

But not only do we have to recognize that He is real but we also have to resolute in the fact that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. That is the final move of this text, if we are going to live a life that pleases God, we have to believe that God is going to reward our faith. That word for reward paints the picture of wages being paid for a day's work. And so this preacher wants us to know that if we diligently seek God. If we seek him out even when it is delayed then God will reward that kind of faith. In fact, that word for reward literally means that God will prove himself for those who diligently seek after Him. And so the take home message is keep seeking after God and the things of God. You may have experienced some disappointments but God can use those disappointments as the precursor to divine appointments. You may have experienced some sorrow but God can use your sorrow to give you a story of his saving power. You may have endured heartbreak but we serve a God that can mend and heal your broken heart. You may have experienced some setbacks but I know a God that can use setbacks as set ups.

That is what the Ted Williams story is all about. Ted Williams now known across the world as the man with a Golden voice told all of America this week that he had it all a dream job, houses, cars , fame and acclaim. He said he was a functional alcoholic and began to snort and then smoke Cocaine. In 1993 the bottom fell out and he lost everything. Did you hear what I said, he lost everything. And he began to pray to God somewhere in the midst of that situation that God would allow his mother to live another year so that she could witness her son regain another job. In the interview with Matt

Lauer he acknowledged God's hands on him because he said despite all the fire that went into my lungs, God never took my voice. And then Matt Lauer asked him "if it was all coming too fast and too soon, and what he would do differently this time." And Mr. Williams said before when I had the fame and the acclaim, I didn't have God. I didn't acknowledge Him or thank Him. But he said this time, I have God and I acknowledge him daily. He said this time I am acknowledging him in all of my ways. I am finished but I came to let Mr. Williams speak for himself because he bears witness to this scripture, a week ago he was living in a shelter. A week ago he was panhandling. But he never lost faith in God and this week He is an internet sensation. This week he is the official spokesman for Kraft Cheese and Macaroni. This week he is the voice of the Cleveland Cavaliers. And I don't know how you feel about but that is Good news and I thank God this morning that if we keep seeking Him, if we keep acknowledging Him...

And as I watched that video this week over and over again, I kept saying to myself look at my God. But I did not need Ted Williams' story, I often say the same thing when I hear the testimony of the saints at this branch of Zion. When he heals your bodies...look at my God! When he makes a way out of no way look at my God! When he opens doors unexpectedly...look at my God. And so no matter what it looks like, no matter the frustration or the disappointment. No matter when it looks like it won't work. I keep trusting my God because even when I doubt myself...I never doubt my God. The devil is a liar. And I have come to declare and in 2011 I have come to declare to every devil, demon, detractor and distractor that you can't make me doubt Him because I know too much about Him. And what I know about Him is that He is able...(when I am not, when I can't, when I won't) He's able...Anybody know that GOD IS ABLE!

Great God from Zion, There are some things I may not know and there are some places I cannot but I am sure of this one thing (sit down) that my God is real for I can feel Him deep within!

SERMON SAMPLE #3

Hebrews 11 ²⁴ **By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.**

LESSONS LEARNED FROM A LIFE OF FAITH!

We all know well his chronology, circumstances and the challenges he faced. We know the highs and lows of his life. His frustrations and his fears. We are familiar with the events of his birth, his exploits and his escape from Egypt. His exile in Midian. His mountainside encounter with God in the burning bush epiphany. His enlistment by God in the liberation of His people. Their collective Exodus out of Egypt. Their encampment in the wilderness. We know about the establishment of the 10 commandments. And the aim and purpose of this writer was not to write a biography of the life of Moses but rather through a brief summary and synopsis of his life to provide us with an example of one, who in his estimation embodied a growing and vibrant faith. And as such is being lifted up from the pages of history, freed from the annals of time and re-interpreted within their context as an example worth emulating.

We have shared and discovered that this body of believers, this assembly of the saints, this community of the faithful are being persecuted and as a result of the intensity and duration of the persecution are now moving away from the faith. But an even sadder reality is that they are losing faith in God. And I might as well pause for the cause and bookmark this point because there is not sadder reality than when the faithful begin to lose their faith. This writer is writing to address the apostasy or the turning away from

the faith of his congregation. And as we discovered in Chapter 10, he has exhorted and encouraged them to keep the faith. He has told them to hold fast to their profession... He has told them in verses 1-3, that they should live a life pleasing to God. He has shared with them in verses, 5 and 6 that “without FAITH it is impossible to please God!” And then in our text for teaching this morning, he lifts up Moses as an exemplar of the kind of faith he has been purporting. And I have come to declare that there are some lessons of faith that we can learn from the life of Moses.

And the first lesson this text teaches us about faith is that we must have our own faith. We must know for ourselves that God is who He says He is, that He is Real and that He will and can do what He says He can do. The text says in vs. 23 that because of His parents faith they hid him for three months but verse 24 says by faith Moses, when he was grown up refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter. But how many of you know that if we are going to move forward, we must have our own faith. This progression in the story reminds us that Moses had his own faith walk. It is good to recount the testimony of the elders but when you have your own testimony. It was good that he was introduced to the faith by his parents. And I know we like to sing faith of our Fathers and Faith of our Mothers but at some point we need to develop our faith, our confidence and trust in God. In some point, we need to be able to say for ourselves “I trust in God, I know He cares for me. At some point, we should be able to say, “Through it all, I’ve learned to trust in Jesus and I’ve learned to trust in God. Somewhere in our journey, we should be able to declare like our elders, “I will trust in the Lord until I die.” This text reminds us and reinforces for us that we must live by faith.

And the first lesson I learned from Moses is we have to have our own faith, but secondly, we must examine our associations. Look at verse 24, it says by faith when Moses became of age, when he was grown up, when he had ascended to the place of power, prestige and privilege. In fact that is what that construction means. He is at the point in his life and career when he was about to become the man. And the text says that he walked away from it all and refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. And a lesson for all of us is you know that your faith is growing when you are able to walk away from some stuff and people for the sake of your relationship with God. The text says he refused what he had every right to claim but because of his faith in God he denounced it all. Through the eyes of faith we come to realize that everything that looks good, ain't good. Everything that looks good to you, ain't good for you. Everything that glitters ain't gold.

But not only did his faith effect his associations it also affected his affiliations. It suggests that as our faith matures not only will we examine our associations but we will also evaluate our affiliations because the text says that rather than maintain his power, privilege and prestige he chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. In other words, Moses' faith would not allow him to sit back while other people were suffering. His faith, not his lineage, ethnicity or race...it was his faith that connected him to the people of God in such a way that when he saw them suffering he identified with their suffering. And if we are going to mature in our faith, our faith in God should lead us to identify not just with those leading the pack but also those in the back of the line. Come on somebody, I am talking about the least, the last, the lost, the left out, the left behind, the long forgotten, the less fortunate, those

locked out, locked up and locked in. Faith affected Moses values and should affect our values as well. Our faith should lead us to a place where we place more value on building people than building buildings. More value in giving than receiving. More value in the agenda of God rather than our own agenda.

James was on to something when he said “Faith without works is dead.” He was on to something when he said don’t tell me you have faith and you won’t help your sister and your brother. He says in James 2: 14-20. **My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can’t save anyone, can it?** ¹⁵ **Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat.** ¹⁶ **What if one of you said, “Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!”? What good is it if you don’t actually give them what their body needs?** ¹⁷ **In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn’t result in faithful activity.** ¹⁸ **Someone might claim, “You have faith and I have action.” But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I’ll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action.** ¹⁹ **It’s good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear.** ²⁰ **Are you so slow? Do you need to be shown that faith without actions has no value at all?**

The SEARCH Institute said it this way people of mature faith or growing faith not only advocate social change, but become personally involved in serving, consistently and passionately, through acts of love and justice. When your faith is growing or maturing, you serve others as well as God. You don’t care who knows, who gets the credit, you don’t care how much money (if any is involved). It is not about the accolades and the accomplishments. It is not about who puts you on the back. In fact, the Bible says in

Matthew 6:2-4, if that is what we are waiting for then you already have your reward but this text reminds us that our motivation should be to serve God's people out of devotion to God and because of our relationship to Him. But not only does a growing faith lead us to examine our associations and evaluate our affiliations, a growing faith also might lead us to encounter some accusations. The text says" he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Moses as a result of his associations and affiliation with the suffering of the people of God found himself a victim of accusations. The text calls it reproach, that word for **reproach** literally means to have someone make slanderous accusations against you or to insult you. And the implied message in this verse 26 is that as a result of his decision to denounce the power, prestige and privilege.

Because of his decision to align himself with the less fortunate, he was forced to endure slanderous accusations and had insult upon insult heaped upon him. And beloved don't be surprised that as your faith grows and as you begin to move away from some folk. And move away from some stuff. And move toward the things of God, do not be surprised if they do not call you everything but a child of God. Don't be surprised if they question your motives and your intentions. You will face reproach. Don't be shocked when folk start to talk about you and when they work against you. Don't be surprised if it is all about the money, all about the power, all about the privilege and prestige. I'm trying to free somebody today. A preacher told me recently that you haven't been fully delivered until you have been delivered from people, so I am trying to help somebody this morning. Don't be surprised if they talk about you...don't be surprised! They said they would walk with you, now they are walking away. They said they would help you,

now you can't find them. They said they had your back (that's my favorite), now they are trying to hold you back. And all you tried to do was help somebody, Rev. Bryant. You invested in the enterprise, paid your dues, gave your tithes and they make you feel like an outsider, Rev. Abrams-Wallace. Do not be surprised, just tried to love somebody, Pray for somebody. Help somebody along the way! Gave of your best to the Master, Mrs. Chapman and it seems like all you get in return is "reproach." But I like Moses response, he considered his reproach GREATER than all the treasures of Egypt. Greater than all the power, privilege and prestige! Greater than the accolades and applause of Man because he knew that there was a greater reward... You looking at me funny, I am in the text...it says he was looking to the reward. And as we discovered last week, God is real and if we but diligently seek Him, He would reward us. But not only will he reward us he will reveal himself to us.

Let me make that plainer, the text in v. 26 alludes to the fact that as our faith grows we might encounter some accusations but it further implies that we might engender some animosity.

The text says, "By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the King and that he persevered because he saw him who was invisible. That is an important insight, Because in Exodus 2:14 it says that Moses left in fear of Pharaoh, but this writer wants us to know that rather than being mobilized by fear he was motivated by faith. I have come to realize the truth of that physical law that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. In other words, we cannot live in fear and grow in faith. In the lexicon of this generation, FEAR GETS IN THE WAY. And I have come to suggest

that fear gets in many of our ways, fear sets limits. Fear sabotages. Fear short circuits. Fear says we can't. Fear says we will never have. Fear says we never have and we never will. Fear says let's hold on to this and let go of that. Fear holds us back, hinders our progress and halts our momentum. But faith says all things are possible with God. Faith says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Faith says greater is He that is in me than He that is in the World. Faith says God is able. Faith says though he slay me yet will I trust Him. Faith says, it is a little tight right now but I once was young and now a little older and wiser, and I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their seed begging for bread. And I have come to discover that the reason we can move forward even in the face of animosity is because the God we serve is faithful. Is not that good news, that God is faithful. And what this writer wanted his community to understand is they could keep the faith, just like Moses did, we can endure, persevere and remain steadfast because the God we serve is faithful. In fact, it says he was able to look past Pharaoh's anger because of his faith in God. And I need to pause there to encourage and empower somebody this morning. You have faced some obstacles, opposition and opponents but I have come to declare and speak over your life that the God we serve can make all grace abound toward us. The God we serve is faithful and because he is faithful I know that no weapon formed against us shall prosper. He is faithful and so I know that even when we walk through the darkest valley we don't have to fear any evil. He is faithful and because he is faithful, we know that weeping might endure for a night but joy will come in the morning. He is faithful and because he is faithful, what was meant for our evil God will transform it for our good. He is faithful and because he is faithful, he still prepares tables in the presence of our enemies, He anoints our head with oil and over

fills our cups. Because He is faithful I can hold on to my faith, And that is why Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4: 7-9, “we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed.”

Finally, as we grow in our faith not only must we examine our associations, evaluate our affiliations, endure the accusations and expect some animosity but we also have to entrust it all to the Almighty!

Look at the text, it says by faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. This is a direct reference to the Exodus 12 event where Moses instituted or your Bible might say Kept the Passover. And the writer’s inclusion of it in this synopsis was probably intended to remind them of that power event but what relevance would that hold for us. I am glad you asked, let me answer that burning question and return to my seat. On one hand, it is a reference to Exodus 12 but on the other hand, it points to the fact that Moses and the people of God trusted God when all else seemed hopeless. They trusted God even when it didn’t make sense. One commentator said it this way nothing in their previous experience justified putting blood on the door posts and the lintels of their houses, but their faith was vindicated because “when the destroyer of the 1st born” came he passed over their houses. This commentator said Moses and the people had nothing to go on but the confidence and conviction that God had directed them.” And isn’t like that for us sometimes, what we are directed to do just doesn’t make sense. It defies logic. It smacks in the face of common sense but God.

But this text suggests that if God said it, Just do it. Even if it does not make sense. Just do it. Even if it did not work before. Just do it. Go back to school. Finish that

degree. Fix that resume. Apply for the job. Start the business. Just DO it. Don't fall victim to the paralysis of over analysis. If God said you can do it you can do it. If he said you can have it you can have it. If God promised it you can claim it by faith. And the key to it all as you grow in your faith is entrusting it ALL (somebody say ALL), everything, anything to God. Because as we discovered earlier the God we serve is Faithful. And as John Calvin said, "where truth is not apparent, it must be looked for in Faith."

Let me illustrate that for you, Dr. King examined his associations, forgoing the academy and the institutional church, he evaluated his affiliations and marched for justice and for the rights of all of God's children to live with dignity and respect. He endured some accusations, encountered the animosity of a Bull Conner and a J. Edgar Hoover but he never allowed fear to stop him. In fact, in his book *STRIDE TOWARD FREEDOM*, he records the fact that he received a phone call that warned him to leave Montgomery. It was during the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Dr. King began to receive death threats, "Call off the boycott or die." Towards the end, as many as 40 such phone calls came in every day.

It reached an apex late Friday night, Jan. 27, 1956. King slumped home, another long strategy session under his belt, and found Coretta asleep. He paced and knocked about, his nerves still on edge. And presently the phone rang, a sneering voice on the other end: "Leave Montgomery immediately if you have no wish to die." King's fear surged; he hung up the phone, walked to his kitchen, and with trembling hands, put on a pot of coffee and sank into a chair at his kitchen table. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried

to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced God before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: "Stand up for justice, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever." Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything."

And can I pause there to encourage someone that with God you can face anything... You can face the hatred, you can face hostility. You can face negativity. You can face the gossip and gossiper. You can face the bully. You can face anything!!!! Anybody here know that with God I can make it, with God I can take it, with God all things are possible, with God because he is my Jehovah Jireh, my Jehovah Nissi, my Jehovah Ticknew, my Jehovah Rophe, my Jehovah Shalom...

But I have one more example of faith, Jesus came through 40 and 2 generations. He too examined his associations choosing the lakes and mountainsides of Galilee over the religious epicenter of Jerusalem. He evaluated his affiliations and hung out with those who were ostracized and outsiders. He endured some accusations, encountered the

animosity of the religious elite. And as a result they conspired to kill him, the Bible records that he asked that the cup be removed from Him but in the same breath said nevertheless...He had entrusted it all to the Almighty. And just when his enemies were ready to close the book on his life. God stepped in...

And what I have learned from their lives of faith is through it all...through it all I've learned to trust in Jesus and I've learned to trust in God. What I have learned that if I have a problem I serve a God that can solve them. I have learned that God can do what no other power can do. I have learned that we serve a God that specializes.

SERMON SAMPLE #4

I AM GOING TO FINISH THE RACE

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

In remarks that President Obama made at the National Prayer Breakfast on February 3, 2011, he talked about his faith and the pivotal role it plays in his life. He talked about how his faith has been the sustaining force for him over the last few years. And was even candid enough to admit that his faith journey has had its share of twists and turns and has not always been a straight line. And as I read the transcript of that speech I appreciated his candor. Why, because my faith journey has had its share of twists and turns as well. In fact life takes some turns that we never expected, anticipated, prepared for. In fact, I have discovered that life can turn in a minute with no warning and the danger is always in losing sight of our faith. And so there were moments when I was tempted to give in, give up, give it back, walk away, walk out and just plain quit.

But what I have also come to realize is that President Obama and I have some company because there are those here this afternoon who know for themselves that this faith journey is full of twists and turns, ups and downs, successes and failures. And if the truth be told you too felt like giving in, giving up, giving it back, walking away, walking out and just plain quitting. But I came by this afternoon on Divine Assignment to declare that quitting is not in your destiny, quitting is not an option because you can, you will and you must finish this race.

That is the exact sentiment expressed by Smokie Norful in his song *Run Till I Finish*, in that song he declared I have decided Determined I am committed That I will run No matter the cost. And I have decided Determined I am committed That I will run Even though at times I may get lost. And then he spoke those words of self-determination, I am going to finish my race I am going to take my proper place In the winning circle. I'm going to run anyway I do not know where or when or how But I know that I am going to make it.

This is the determination that the writer of Hebrews is trying to engender in his fledgling congregation. He is writing to a people whose faith journey has taken some strange twists and turns. They are being victimized individually and corporately. They are being persecuted and by the time of the writing of this letter the persecution has intensified. And now they too are on the verge of giving up, giving in and walking away. In fact, many are denouncing Jesus and are turning away from the faith that they once professed and practiced. This writer is looking to stem this tide of apostasy and challenges them with the words of our text.

He writes “since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

What this writer communicates to this congregation of believers is that they can finish the race and then provides them with two examples. The first example are those

who came before them. Look he says “since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. That word for witnesses is *Martus*, it is where we get our word for Matyrs. In the legal sense it was used to describe one who was a witness to a contract or legal document or who in court would testify. In the ethical sense, it paints the picture of one who proved the strength and genuiness of their faith in the Lord by enduring severe persecution or undergoing a violent death. In other words, the writer invoking the spirit of those in Chapter 11, Enoch, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He called the name of Rahab, Gideon, Barak and Samson. David, Samuel and the Prophets.

Notice what he did, in chapter 11 he reminded the people of how God had been with them throughout their history and because of their faith in God, they could testify to the goodness of God and His faithfulness. And so what he is saying to them and all of us is I know you have faced some difficulties. You have encountered some mean spirited folk. You have endured the heartache, heartbreak and hardships of following Christ. Of trying to live right. Of trying to love folk who don’t love you in return. I know you know well what it feels like to have folk scandalize your name, sensationalize your mistakes and downplay your accomplishments. I know what that feels like, looks like and sounds like but there were those who came before you who endured much worse. But what they found in the midst of it all was a God who was faithful.

And that is a lesson to our young this morning, I know things can get tough, tight and twisted. However, there are those who came before who went through much worse circumstances and situations. They endured slavery, Jim Crow Segregation. Jim Jr. and Jane Crow legislation. They endured biting dogs and high pressured water hoses. They endured much worse but their testimony is--- that God is faithful. In other words, God is

trustworthy. And I don't know whose street I am on but somebody here knows that God is faithful. (That's my song)...I believe that is somebodies testimony this morning that God is faithful. God keeps his word. God stays true to his nature. He may not come when we want Him to...He may not come according to our schedule...He may not come the way we want Him to...But somebodies testimony is God is faithful. Somebodies testimony is He will come, he will fix it...he will make a way...He will open doors. He is faithful. Who am I talking to... In the morning, He's faithful. In the evening, He's faithful. When I am up...He's faithful. When I am down...He is faithful. On my job...He is faithful, in my home...He is faithful. The Bible declares in Deuteronomy 7:9, asserts He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep his commands. 1 Corinthians 1:9, That the God who called us into fellowship with His son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. 1 Corinthians declares that God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. God is faithful!

And then look at what he says, yes God is faithful and there are those who can testify to His faithfulness since they testify to His faithfulness we can finish this race but then he says we can finish this race once we are free of some stuff. Look at how he presents that truth. He moves from the general to the specific. First, he says in a general sense, since we have that kind of witness, this kind of testimony, "let us throw off every weight", literally throw off every burden. Again, the image is of a runner in that culture who would remove anything that would slow him down. Any extraneous clothing, weight or concerns. The idea is to throw off anything or anybody that would hold you back,

hold you down or hold you up. He says lay it aside. He recognizes that for each of us it is different. We all have things that have been a burden to us in the race of faith. For some it is pride. For others greed. Still others vanity. Some of us are saved, sanctified, Filled with the Holy Spirit and still have terrible tempers. But this writer is encouraging us to put our burdens down. To lose, even our attachment to this world and the things of this world.

He starts with the general and then he transitions to the specific he says and the “sin that so easily entangles.” Literally that means the sin that is readily available, encircles and ambushes the Christian. He is talking about that stuff we find difficult to shake. Those propensities, proclivities and pathologies that make up the fabric of our faith journey. He says if we are not careful our sin can entangle us and ultimately deter, derail, detour and defeat us. I was reminded of this concept a few days ago, I was watching the Patriot, starring Mel Gibson. And in that movie the way that the continental forces overcame the British forces was by ambushing them. And I believe that what this writer understood was that the only way we can be defeated is by carrying unnecessary weight and being “ambushed” by our sins. He says our sin can entangle us and ensnare us and keep us from finishing this race.

And then he shifts from encouragement to exhortation. He says and let us run. He understands that he is linked to the believing community. This race of faith is not intended for the super spiritual, the highly favored, the anointed and appointed this is a race that we all can participate in but what he understands is that if we are going to finish the race we have to have endurance. The word for endurance is *hupomone*. It also means perseverance. It carries the dual meaning of passive endurance and active persistence. It conveys the idea of being steadfast, consistent, unwavering and unflinching. It speaks to

a determination that we as believers must embody and exhibit. It is the picture of soldiers who have been ordered to maintain their positions even in the face of fierce combat. The order was to stand your ground and defend what had been gained and to stand no matter how hard or difficult the assignment. And so the exhortation is to run the race and to stand your ground no matter how hard it gets. And I need to pause for the cause, because that is an exhortation for all of us. That no matter how hard it gets, no matter how difficult it appears, no matter what it looks like. Stand your ground.

Disappointment...stand your ground. Discouragement...stand your ground. Heartbreak and heartache...stand your ground. Trouble in your way and you want to cry all (not some) all of the time...stand your ground. Folk acting funny. Folk working against you... Friends can't be found. Family can't be trusted...**STAND YOUR GROUND!**

Stand your ground when others walk away. Stand your ground when others give up and give in. **STAND YOUR GROUND!** And I pray, this gets in somebodies spirit today and they will declare I don't care how heavy the load. I don't care how much pressure I am under. I don't care if folk think I am crazy. I will stand my ground. I will endure hardship like a good soldier. I will remain steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. I will not be moved. I am going to stand my ground. Because greater is He that is in me than He that is in the world. I am going to stand because I know that He that begun a good work in me will bring it to completion. I'm going to stand because I once was young, now a little wiser and I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their seed begging bread. I'm going to stand, because I know like James knew that the "testing of our faith produces HUPOMONE and HUPOMONE when it

finishes its work will make us mature and complete lacking nothing. It is in the running of this race with endurance and perseverance that our faith is strengthened.

So often we want that kind of faith that will allow us to endure and persevere without going through anything but the reality is that our faith is only strengthened to the extent that we stand our ground even when it doesn't make sense. A group of scientist wanted to see what would happen if they freed the caterpillar from their cocoon. And so as any good scientist will do they used two groups. A group they freed and a group they allowed to free themselves. What they discovered was that the butterflies they freed developed normally but they couldn't fly. Their conclusion was that the butterflies developed the capacity to fly through the struggle. And that is what this writer is communicating that we develop our faith in the struggle, through the adversity, through the pain and disappointment. It is through the struggle that we learn to trust God. Through the struggle we learn to believe His word. Through the struggle we learn to speak His word over our situation. Through the struggle we learn that God is still in control. Through the struggle we learn to trust in Jesus!

Isn't that what He says in the text, he says let us run this race with patience and perseverance that has been set before us AND looking to Jesus! Don't miss this! He has offered encouragement, given and exhortation and now like any good writer he provides another example. He says looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Literally, he is saying we can finish the race because of our focus. He says we have to look to Jesus. The word for look means to turn the eyes away from any and everything else and fix them on something or someone.

What this writer understands is that when we take our eyes off of Jesus we too get distracted. And so what this writer is saying is get your focus off of yourselves. Get your focus off of other people, Get your focus off of your circumstances and your problems and turn your focus onto Jesus. Why Preacher? Because He is the Author and finisher of our faith. Not other people. Not our property and possessions. Not our credentials and certifications. Not our affiliations and associations. Not our clubs, cliques or churches. Our focus should be on Jesus, He is the ultimate example of the kind of faith that is pleasing to God. Literally, He is the author, the captain, the originator and the source of our faith. And as great as the faith was of those in Chapter 11, we should look to Jesus because He is the supreme example of faith. But not only is he the source of our faith and the supreme example but He is also the finisher of our faith. It is in Jesus that our faith is made perfect and complete. In other words, Jesus is the start and finish of our faith. He is the beginning and the ending. He is the approved trailer before the movie and the closing credits. He is the prologue and epilogue of our favorite book. He is the commencement and the conclusion of our faith. And if we are going to finish this race we have to keep our focus on Him. That is why the elders would sing turn your eyes upon Jesus and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. They would sing O soul are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see? There's light for a look at the Savior, and life more abundant and free. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, he is Abrahams ram in the bush, Moses staff and rod. He is Gideons fleece...He is Elijah's anointing. He is Isaiah's hope. He is Jeremiah's mighty battle axe. He is Matthews messiah. He is Marks way in the wilderness. He is Luke's Great Physician. He is John's light to the World. And I have come to declare today that

we have to keep our eyes on Him. Follow his example. Turn your eyes upon Jesus who for the Joy set before him endured the cross, despising it's shame... And because he finished his race, he now is seated at the right hand of the Father. When he wanted to walk away. When His flesh and resolve weakened. When it seemed that his enemies had gotten the best of him, when it seemed that the salvific plan was sabotaged, Jesus finished the race because God stepped in... and the old Baptist preachers would say, Early one Sunday Morning....God stepped in...and He got up and finished the race with all power in His hands....

Let me close it this way, Derek Redmond was the favored in the 400 meter race during the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. This was especially special because he had missed the 88 Olympics because of a torn Achilles. When the race began Redmond jumped out to a commanding lead when the unthinkable occurred. He felt a "pop" in his leg. He fell to the track in excruciating pain. The first thought that popped in his mind was that he would not finish the race. He laid there for a while, as the medics descended upon the track. But Mr. Redmond refused the medical attention and he refused to get on the stretcher. He was determined to finish the race. He hobbled to his feet and painfully began to make his way around the track. At some point, his father who was in the crowd made his way to the track. He placed his arms around Mr. Redmond. Daddy Redmond whispered in his son's ear, "son together we will finish this race." And together, leaning on each other they finished the race. And I have come to submit that in this race of face we too can finish the race, if we just learn to lean, trust and depend on our heavenly father.

Are you feeling me yet? Anybody here know that we have come this far by
faith...leaning on the Lord...And because I can lean on him...

Nothing is going to stop me

I won't be denied

I won't be deterred

I won't give up

I won't give in

I won't stop

I won't be scared

I won't let anybody turn me around...

I won't get no-ways tired because I've come too far from where I started from where I
started from...

I am going to finish this race...

APPENDIX D
BIBLE STUDY SCHEDULE/OUTLINE

Bible Study Schedule
The Book of James
Series: Interactive Faith (*IFaITH*)

Week One	Chapter 1: A Faith that Overcomes
Week Two	Chapter 2: A Faith that Works
Week Three	Chapter 3: A Faith that controls the Tongue
Week Four	Chapter 4: A Faith that leads to Unity
Week Five	Chapter 5: A Faith that Prays

Weekly Schedule:

6:30-7:00 p.m.	Corporate Prayer
7:00-7:15 p.m.	Sermon Re-cap
7:15-8:00 p.m.	Bible Study
8:00-8:30 p.m.	Small Group Discussion
8:30 p.m.	Closing Prayer

SAMPLE BIBLE STUDY OUTLINE
JAMES 5:1-20

VV. 1-6

1. Introduces a pronouncement of judgment probably linked to chapter 4 vv. 13-17
2. What will the Impending judgment look like?
 - a. Wealth rotted
 - b. Moths have eaten clothes
 - c. Gold and silver have corroded
 - d. Corrosion will testify against you/eat flesh like fire
3. Why will there be judgment?
 - a. Economic injustice, oppression and exploitation
 - i. Hoarding wealth
 - ii. Failure to pay
 - iii. Luxury/self-indulgence/fattened selves
 - iv. Condemned and murdered **innocent** men/opposed you---Literally, "He does not oppose you!"
 - b. Notice the reoccurring themes (1:9-11; 2:1-17)

VV. 7-11

1. The encouragement to endure in the struggle.
 - a. Three illustrations
 - i. Farmer (7-9)
 - ii. Prophets (10)
 - iii. Job (11)
 - b. Notice the reoccurring theme (1:2-4, 12)

V. 12

2. The exhortation of Right Speech.
 - a. Literally, stop making "oaths"
 - i. Matthew 5:34-37
 - ii. Prohibition against false religiosity/built on mutual trust
 - b. Notice the reoccurring themes (1:19, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12)

VV. 13-18

3. The effectiveness of sincere, fervent prayer.
 - a. Exhortation to effective prayer
 - i. Self/suffering
 - ii. Others/sick
 1. Prayer of faith will heal
 2. If sinned/forgiven
 - b. Example of effective prayer
 - i. Elijah
 1. Humility
 2. Humanity
 - c. Notice the reoccurring themes (1:5-8; 4:2)

VV. 19-20

1. The exhortation to restore those who have wandered from the truth
 - a. Truth= Gospel of Jesus Christ
 - i. Save his soul
 - ii. Cover a multitude of sins

APPENDIX E
FAITH SCRIPTURES FOR WEEKLY LECTIO DIVINA

FAITH SCRIPTURES FOR WEEKLY LECTIO DIVINA

Matthew 9:22

Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.

Matthew 15:28

Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Matthew 21:21-22

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Mark 11:22-23

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him."

Luke 17:6

He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

Luke 18:42

Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."

Romans 1:16-17

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

2 Corinthians 5:7

We live by faith, not by sight.

Ephesians 6:16

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the

flaming arrows of the evil one.

Galatians 3:26

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus

Hebrews 10:22

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

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